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The American Civil War: A Diplomatic Perspective of Confederate Diplomacy

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The American Civil War: A Diplomatic Perspective of Confederate Diplomacy

BY

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Introduction

The American Civil War is almost never perceived or framed in an international scope. The focus and study has been laser focused on the North American continent, the United States, and mostly on the eastern theater of military operations. The western theater is usually only mentioned with the lead up of General Ulysses S. Grant before he takes command of the Army of the Potomac and the Union victories up and down the Mississippi River. Politics is of course noted: the Republicans, with Abraham Lincoln, win the election of 1860; the Southern Democrats leave the Union over fears of abolition from the so-called Black Republicans. Economics has always been at the heart of Civil War analysis as well. The issue of slavery is, at its very core, an economic concern. Slaves were very hefty capital investments made by the Southern planter elite, the same group of men who pushed the South into disunion. Slavery was also a fight over property rights and the freedoms guaranteed to American citizens in the Constitution.

One large aspect of the war that is often unappreciated in the teachings and perceptions of the American Civil War: diplomacy. It is diplomacy that almost expanded the American Civil War into a global conflict. Diplomacy could have altered the course of history and changed the face of the globe and all of human history with it. Diplomacy was the key to the success of the Confederate States of America and yet, it is not given more than a brief mention in passing in the classroom or in the minds of the public today.

The American Civil War is such a massive subject for historians to focus on and study. Soon after the guns fell silent in May 1865, historians, veterans, and statesmen alike started to write down the story of the American Civil War: why it happened, what that experience was like, not only for them or their families or colleagues, but the entire

nation as well, and what the consequences were of this terribly costly war. Despite this massive and extensive library of historical knowledge and scholarly writing on the war that is currently in existence, only a small sliver deals with diplomacy in any great detail.

Historiography

While Civil War diplomacy is underappreciated, there are some important works that shed light on this complex and vitally important subject. One of the main themes that historians tend to look at when researching and analyzing diplomacy during the Civil War is Anglo-American relations. This is a very useful tool to describe why diplomacy did or did not work in certain situations for the Confederacy. It is not however, Civil War diplomacy. International relations play a very important role in the context and scope of Civil War diplomacy. Numerous journal articles have been published citing the turbulent Anglo-American relations between the Union and the English over the course of the Civil War. The South failed to capitalize on the sour relations early in the war and so their diplomacy failed, is the general argument presented in histories that over emphasize the tumultuous relations between England and the Union. These studies tell a very important part of the story but not the entirety of said story. "Power, Sovereignty, and the Great Republic: Anglo-American Relations in the Ear of the Civil War" by Brian Reid is a fantastic journal article that summarizes the Union view of the English and vice versa during the conflict. Reid points to the balance of power and how the other side viewed the other. The relations between the two nations was put to the test by the Civil War.¹ The article is well researched, but the focus and emphasis put on Anglo-American

¹ Brian Reid, "Power, Sovereignty, and the Great Republic: Anglo-American Relations in the Ear of the Civil War," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 14, no. 2 (2003): 45-46.

relations is far too great. That relationship needs to be put into a greater context of Civil War diplomacy as a whole.

There are a few very important and influential historians writing in this field. One of them is David Paul Crook. Two of his most famous and well-respected books are *The North, the South, and the Powers 1861-1865* and *Diplomacy during the American Civil War*.² These two very well written narratives were both published in the mid-1970s. Most of the literature on Civil War diplomacy was written from an older historical perspective and is in need of updating and revising. Crook focuses his studies on the Union, France, and England. Crook finds the most important themes and narratives of Civil War diplomacy come from that older perspective. The political instability of Europe during the decades leading up to the Civil War is the primary reason, according to Crook, that the English and French did not join the Confederacy. Politics, and to a lesser extent the economy, are at the forefront of his argument and research. The diplomats involved in the negotiations take a back seat in his study. His study is narrowly focused on Anglo-American relations during this period, and his research relies mainly on secondary sources. This secondary research is not just regurgitated, however. Crook gives his own personal take on the research that was available at the time of his writing. His argument that the European climate was a major influence on the decisions by the English and French governments not to intervene in the American Civil War is respected and valued today. Crook does a great job of retelling well established themes and narratives such as the *Trent* affair, the cotton famine, and French and English relations during the American Civil War. Despite this, Crook fails to give proper acknowledgement to the other powers

² David Paul Crook, *The North, the South, and the Powers: 1861-1865* (New York: Wiley, 1974) and David Paul Crook, *Diplomacy during the American Civil War* (New York: Wiley, 1975).

in Europe at the time: Spain, Russia, Prussia, or Belgium. Crook downplays their role and importance to the diplomatic efforts on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. To Crook, “Spain, Austria, and Russia merely flit across the stage.”³ This is plainly not so. True, the major players in Union and Confederate diplomacy were both France and England. However, both nations sent delegations to Belgium, Russia, Mexico, and other minor nations to plead their case. These smaller diplomatic battles were very important to the overall success or failure of Union and Confederate efforts.

Another important author in this area of history is Norman B. Ferris. His books, *The Trent Affair: A Diplomatic Crisis*, and *Desperate Diplomacy: William H. Seward’s Foreign Policy, 1861*, are both very well researched and well written historical narratives focusing mainly on the Union side of diplomacy.⁴ Ferris’ work on William Seward, Lincoln’s Secretary of State during the Civil War, attempts to put Seward in a better light and clear up some misconceptions historians have had regarding his diplomatic efforts, especially in the first year of the war. Ferris does not see some of Seward’s actions, such as threatening war with England over the recognition of the Confederate States of America, as rash, impulsive, or dangerous, like many of his colleagues. Ferris relied on archival material and manuscripts and not so much on being critical of other historians works.⁵ This served his work well. It was focused on interpreting the historical record rather than going out of his way to criticize the other negative aspects of the Seward historiography. Ferris only focuses on the Anglo-American relations before and during

³ *The North, the South, and the Powers*, vi.

⁴ Norman B. Ferris, *The Trent Affair: A Diplomatic Crisis* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

⁵ Norman Ferris, *Desperate Diplomacy: William H. Seward’s Foreign Policy, 1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), viii.

the war in these books. He sees this relationship as the most important during the Civil War. Diplomacy is more than just the relationship between two nations. Ferris fails to expand on the relations the Union and Seward had with other European nations such as France or Spain. He also fails to mention, in great detail, the Southern perspective, their relationship with England, or a detailed view of Confederate-Anglo relations. These other angles in international relations are vital to understanding the entire story of the failure of Confederate diplomacy.

One of the larger, more well-known books on Civil War diplomacy is *Blue & Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* written by Howard Jones.⁶ This has become the book at the forefront of scholarly work surrounding Civil War diplomacy. Jones goes into great detail about both Union and Confederate diplomatic efforts. He explores the lesser known aspects of this complex story, such as neutrality rights, the 1856 Declaration of Paris, and the British troops sent to Canada. England and France are obviously at the center of his research. Jones notes the strain in Anglo-American relations but does not dwell on this topic. He delves into economic and political aspects of diplomacy as well. However, his work is not without fault. Little is mentioned about public opinion in England or in America, North or South. Public opinion played an important role in the outcome of the diplomatic operations of both the Confederacy and the Union. Jones could have done more to explore how the public was reacting to Union and Confederate diplomats and how their reaction altered the opinions of those in government, especially the outspoken members of Parliament. Jones also glosses over the Russian diplomatic initiatives. This needs more attention as well.

⁶ Howard Jones, *Blue and Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* (Chapel Hill, NC: University Of North Carolina Press, 2010).

Although Jones' book included both Union and Confederate efforts, his book focuses heavily on the consideration of aid being provided to the South by the English. The book lacked what the Union dealings were with the two great powers, France and England, headed by Charles Adams. Overall, Howard Jones created a work that is well researched and very well written that explores the complex world of international diplomacy during the American Civil War.

To break from the Anglo-centric focus of many historians, Lynn Case and Warren Spencer shift the study to France, the other Great Power in Europe. Case and Spencer see the value and importance the French played in the struggle for Confederate recognition. In their book, *The United States and France: Civil War Diplomacy*, the two authors describe the French position during the Civil War.⁷ However, the book does note the early French leanings towards the Confederacy and some of their relations over the course of the Civil War. This book also is told from a Eurocentric perspective rather than an American one. It was very smart of Case and Spenser to do this. It changes the existing historiography on Civil War diplomacy and acknowledges ~~over~~ view points and perspectives other than that of the Americans, Union or Confederate. The study also taps into the inner workings of the Franco-British diplomatic relationship during this time as well. The book cites meeting after meeting between the two nations before discussing policy matters with the Union. It shows their close working relationship during the American Civil War. The book does retell old themes such as the cotton famine and the decision by Napoleon III to hasten the French invasion of Mexico because of the collapse

⁷ Lynn M. Case and Warren F. Spenser, *The United States and France: Civil War Diplomacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970).

of the Confederacy. But, the book overall stands the test of time. Despite being published in 1970, Case and Spenser have created a study that is both informative and noteworthy.

These historical works are very important to the complete story of the American Civil War. It was not just about battles, politics, or slavery. This historiography illustrates that there was another war going on behind the scenes that should be brought to the forefront of discussion. Yes, Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant were fighting it out on the battlefield to determine the future of the American Union. However, both North and South were fighting on another front, the diplomatic front with words and pens instead of minie balls, cannons, and bayonet charges. Diplomats were working tirelessly throughout the war to help their side win. The South scrambled to find European nations to recognize them as an independent nation and help with their war effort against the might of the Union armies. The Union on the other hand fought to maintain the status quo. The current, outdated literature puts too much focus on the cotton famine and Anglo-American relations as an explanation as to why the European powers never recognized the Confederacy. Diplomacy is about the personality of the diplomats themselves, not just economics or the like. What the other historians have failed to analyze in great detail or make the central focus of Civil War diplomacy are the diplomats themselves. Those men are responsible for the success or failure in how the European powers viewed the Confederate States of America. It is important to look at who Jefferson Davis appointed as he was establishing the Confederate government and why these individuals received their appointments. It is also important to look at the diplomats' backgrounds and personal viewpoints to understand why they made the choices they made while over in Europe.

Another aspect of the historiography that requires revision is that the focus is limited to England and France primarily. While it is true that both England and France played the biggest roles in both Union and Confederate diplomacy, they were not the only nations to receive diplomatic attention. Spain, Russia, Belgium, Prussia, the Vatican, Mexico, and even the Native American tribes were reached out to by either the Union, Confederacy, or both. Diplomatic effort during the American Civil War was not just focused in Europe on the Great Powers, as most historians make it out to be. The Confederates put the majority of their effort and faith in both England and France, but they were not the only road to recognition. The other powers in Europe and the Americas are worth exploring. A comprehensive account of diplomacy during the Civil War, and explanation for why the Confederacy failed to gain recognition, includes looking at these lesser discussed or forgotten nations.

This thesis will proceed as follows. Chapter One will unpack the policy makers in the Confederate State Department. Because diplomacy, at its most basic, is the interaction between people to push an agenda, the diplomats, heads of state, and members of Congress/Parliament should be focused on, specifically their background and their beliefs on foreign relations. By breaking that open and analyzing those beliefs and personalities it will be easier to piece together their decision making during the war. Actions performed by the state are ultimately the result of the leaders of that state. That is the main point that current Civil War diplomacy is lacking. While it is important to study the larger political and economic context, which most historians in this area of study have done a very thorough job, those two central themes contain human elements that are often overlooked.

The second chapter will focus on the Confederate diplomatic efforts in Mexico and with the Native American tribes in early 1861. These were the first instances where the Confederacy reached out to other foreign powers after secession. The main targets of the Davis administration were England and France, the two major powers in Europe at the time. However, Davis and his state department had the brains to send commissioners to the Native Americans to secure treaties ranging from trade agreements to alliances. This was an important milestone in the history of the international relations of the Confederacy. Their early successes with the Indians gave added hope and confidence to the Davis administration of their chances to negotiate with the European powers. The Mexican expedition is also important to study because it is the first time where both the Union and Confederate diplomats clash to influence the leader of a foreign nation. This interaction will be repeated in royal courts across Europe during the duration of the war.

Chapter Three will shift the focus to the European theater of diplomatic battle, focusing on France and the lesser powers of Europe. These lesser nations played a role in the diplomacy of both the North and the South. The Russians, Belgians, Spanish, and even the Vatican were all targets of diplomatic interactions during the war. Obviously, the French and the English were the main targets, but effort and time were sunk into these smaller nations of Europe for a reason. The Confederacy was casting a wide net at the outbreak of hostilities. They were looking for friends wherever they could find them. The Spanish, French, Dutch, and English all had ports in the Caribbean and Davis wanted access to them to make running the ever-tightening Union blockade that much easier. These less powerful nations on the European continent could, without a doubt, be very useful in the eyes of the Confederacy. That is why it is very important not to overlook the

efforts by the Confederacy to persuade them to join their war efforts and recognize them as a legitimate nation. The French also played a major role in the mission to Mexico made by the Confederates as well. Napoleon III had hopes of restoring the French Empire to its former glory and Mexico was one of his targets. The Confederacy could take advantage of that opportunity.

Chapter Four will focus on the main player, England. They were the top power in Europe at the time. The Confederate hope, early on, was that when England recognized them as a sovereign nation, the rest of Europe would quickly follow, and the Union would have no choice but to concede. Obviously, that did not occur. It is not debated that the Confederacy needed England to sign off on their independence for it to become legitimate. A nation is only a nation once it has been formally recognized by the major international powers; the Confederacy knew this and made a great effort to bring England to their side. Trade and cotton, as mentioned previously, are the main concerns many historians point to as the leading reasons that the English government failed to recognize the Confederacy. However, this chapter will examine the international maritime laws that focus on privateering and the rights of neutral shipping and the legality of a blockade being established. The English were the ones to push for these international laws to be passed after the Crimean War. They were near and dear to the hearts of the English Parliament and other government officials in England. Both the issue of trade and cotton supplies rest upon this larger issue of maritime law and the enforcement of those laws established by the international community in Europe. The Confederacy did not sign onto these naval laws and this hurt their credibility with some in the English government. The Confederacy had no navy to speak of at the outbreak of the war and needed these

privateers to supply the South and fend off the Union blockade. They were unwilling to change this tactic for the English. However, the Union blockade was questioned as well as their attacks on English shipping. These breaches in maritime law sparked heated debates in the House of Lords and were a big concern to all of Parliament. This focus on maritime law and the realization that England is a maritime superpower at this time is often absent in the historiography Civil War diplomacy.

This thesis will explain why the South failed to gain European recognition along with the Union efforts to combat those diplomats loyal to Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy. The emphasis will focus on the diplomats themselves. They are the most important factor in diplomacy, but they are the least examined part of Civil War diplomacy. It is very important to dissect these individuals and determine who they were, how they acted, and what they thought in order to fully understand the Confederate diplomatic failure. Also, this thesis will explore the other nations that scholars have left out of their works. These nations also participated in the diplomatic actions and negotiations. It is not the intention of this thesis to change the historiography of Civil War diplomacy because there are very important and well researched books already in place. Rather, I seek to add on to the existing work and offer an updated analysis of the sources available to scholars. Diplomacy is a very broad topic packed full of information and confusion, and Civil War diplomacy is in need of an update.

Chapter One:

The Confederate Secretaries of State: The Revolving Door of Richmond

In modern conception, the term “foreign relations” conjures up images of embassy buildings surrounded by guards, the United Nations members in the grand hall with placards of their nation alongside a small flag of their nation, or, in the case of the United States, images of the State Department in downtown Washington D.C. However, the common thread that binds all of these ideas together and connects them are the individuals who actually conduct the diplomacy. During the American Civil War, the diplomacy was conducted via personal meetings and letters of correspondence. Even with the invention of the internet, telephones, email, and social media, the nations of modern day still send out actual people to represent their government to a foreign nation. The importance of the individual diplomat is often overshadowed or lost in the larger idea of foreign relations or power politics. During the Civil War, the lack of those modern inventions of communication and convenience put all the more importance and pressure on the individual diplomat. Since diplomacy is conducted on the individual level, not at the state level, it was vital that the diplomats assigned to conduct diplomacy for both the Union and Confederacy had a good notion of the field, were determined, and could carry out the assignments handed down from their superiors. Both Lincoln and Davis placed massive trust on the men they sent overseas to conduct diplomacy for their respective nations.

When the Confederate States of America declared its independence in 1861, it had to build a nation and a government from the ground up. The representatives who attended the secession debates in their states and decided to resign their seats in the

House and the Senate, their commission in the Army or Navy, or resign from the multitude of federal positions in Washington D.C. did so knowing the risks involved and the work that needed to be done to secure their independence and build a nation based on their own ideals. These men who would form the inner circle of the Confederate government came from all across the Confederacy. Each man brought his own set of skills, his own ideas and values that, in his mind, best represented this new Confederacy. The United States was built on the principle that everyone is entitled to have and to share their opinion. That is a wonderful protection this country has. However, when forming a nation out of nothing, like the Founding Fathers did back in the 1780s, differing ideas can cause conflict and friction that tests the infant nation's limits. The Founding Fathers had time to have open debates and discussions about what the new United States government would like look and how it would function. The delegates for the Confederacy did not have the luxury of time on their side.

The man elected to lead this new nation was Jefferson Davis. His career in politics began when Davis was campaigning for then presidential nominee James K. Polk. Davis and his family had always been strong supporters of Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and the Democratic Party.⁸ During this campaigning for Polk, Davis would realize his natural talent as a public speaker and his love for politics. The work he did for Polk also introduced this reclusive planter to the people and voters of the state of Mississippi. Due to this new-found popularity, Davis was nominated in 1845 by the Warren County Democratic Convention as its candidate for representative in Congress.⁹ During his time in Congress, Davis would speak out for his home state of Mississippi and

⁸ Clement Eaton, *Jefferson Davis* (New York: Free Press, 1977), 47.

⁹ *Ibid*, 50.

its voters. He was a very engaged and active member of the House of Representatives. While Davis was a Democrat, he broke from the party on numerous occasions. John Calhoun introduced a harbor and rivers improvement bill, and he wanted the Mississippi and its tributary rivers to be categorized as an inland sea and thus able to be selected for congressional money for improvements.¹⁰ Davis was appalled at such a bill because it violated his strict interpretation of the Constitution. He stuck with the more traditional Democratic approach to leave internal improvements to the states.¹¹ Another notable break from the party was during his times in the House. In 1846, Davis delivered a speech before the House on the Oregon question. The Democratic Party was in favor of repealing the treaties signed with England regarding how to and where to split the Oregon Territory. The Democrats wanted to push the boundary all the way to the Russian border of 54 degrees.¹² Davis agreed that acquiring both California and the Oregon Territory was in the best interest of the United States but was not in the extremist camp of “54° 40’ or Fight.” He did not think risking war with England over Oregon was necessary.¹³ His time in the House of Representatives would help shape Davis’ political views as well as introduce him not only to fellow representatives but also to the nation and politics.

The Mexican-American War changed Davis. He would go from slow expansionist by Southern Democrat standards to a radical, pro Southern expansionist. During his time serving as the Secretary of War in Pierce’s cabinet, Davis took the lead on a plan to annex all of Cuba and carve three states out of the Spanish colony. The island, of course, would have to be flooded with new slaves and that meant reopening the African slave

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 54.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 54.

¹² *Ibid*, 54.

¹³ *Ibid*, 54.

trade.¹⁴ This outspoken attitude towards Southern expansion also gained Davis notable attention. He took his Southern nationalism to the Nashville Convention in 1850; Davis was one of its most passionate promoters.¹⁵ His fiery rhetoric on secession would die down after the convention and his loss of the governor's office in his home state of Mississippi to Henry Foote.¹⁶ Despite this, sectional tension was heating up and the nation was hurtling towards a civil war.

Unlike most of his fellow Southerners in Congress, Davis waited until he received official notice that his home state of Mississippi had in fact seceded from the Union. On January 21, 1861, Jefferson Davis would give his farewell address to the Senate and resign his post. His speech was well spoken and dignified. Davis doubled down on his commitment to secession during this speech. Mississippi has a "justifiable cause, and I approve of her act."¹⁷ By leaving the Union, Mississippi would "surrender all the benefits, deprive herself of all the advantages, sever all ties of affection which have bound her to the Union." However, by giving up these numerous benefits, Mississippi was "exempt from any power to execute the laws of the United States within her limits."¹⁸ To Davis, secession was legitimate and within any state's authority. His parting words to his fellow Congressmen was that of peace and stability going forward. Davis urged "peaceful relations with [the North], though we must part. They may be mutually beneficial to us in the future, as they have been in the past, if you so will it."¹⁹ Davis

¹⁴ Burton J. Hendrick, *Statesmen of the Lost Cause: Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet* (New York: Literacy Guild of America, 1939), 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 50.

¹⁷ Farewell Address, January 21, 1861, in *Papers of Jefferson Davis 1861*, vol. VII, eds., Lynda Lasswell Crist and Mary Seaton Dix (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 19.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 22.

peremptorily blamed the Union if hostilities were to break out between the North and the South. The North would be the aggressors in this conflict, according to Davis and most, if not all, of his cabinet members.

Davis was unanimously elected President of the Confederate States of America, and he was inaugurated on February 18, 1861. The Montgomery convention decided to elect Davis for president for both practical and political reasons. Both Robert Toombs and Howell Cobb of Georgia were in the running but were passed over because the state of Georgia's votes were split between Toombs, Cobb, and Alexander Stephens, who ended up gathering enough support to become the vice president of the Confederate States of America. Robert Rhett and William Yancey were also passed over because their views on secession were too extreme and the Confederacy was still trying to add more states at this time.²⁰ The Southern press hailed Jefferson as the right man for the job. *The Charleston Mercury* wrote a lengthy article detailing Davis' past accomplishments on the battlefield and in the Senate before announcing his resignation "in a brief address of characteristic loftiness of tone, manliness of sentiment and decision of utterance."²¹ The press painted Davis as a man who stood up for what is right and the only man who could lead the Southern Confederacy to victory over the Union.

The Charleston Mercury promoted Davis in this exact light:

Let it suffice that, judging him by his whole public career, no man, unless Calhoun or Quitman were living, could well dispute with him the highest place in Southern confidence; and that certainly none, dead or living, among Southern statesmen, could be named, who, on the score of administrative ability, are equally adapted with him to fill the high and responsible position to which he has been called, in an emergency which imperiously demands that the right men shall be in the right places.²²

²⁰ *Jefferson Davis*, 125.

²¹ "Jefferson Davis." *The Charleston Mercury*, February 23, 1861.

²² *Ibid.*

Davis was a champion of states' rights and Southern imperialism in the decade following the Mexican-American War. It would be this drive and determination that would propel him to the presidency. However, Davis would have rather commanded troops on the battlefield than organize a government. This mix of reluctance and Southern pride defined him for the rest of his life. His government would be filled with both friends and foes of Davis, but they would have to work together to get the Confederate States of America off the ground and running.

The most important position in the Confederate Cabinet for obtaining international recognition from the powers of Europe was the Secretary of State. This prominent position would be filled four times over the duration of the war. However, Davis originally selected Robert Toombs for the job. Toombs, born in 1810 and the son of a Revolutionary War veteran, found himself in Congress in 1844 representing the citizens of Georgia.²³ He was a member of the Whig Party and a legend in Washington. Charming, charismatic, and appealing to the average citizen, Toombs had a reputation for being an expert in giving speeches and winning debates. This legacy and reputation followed him to Washington. A staunch Whig, Toombs favored a moderate protective tariff. He even enjoyed singling out his fellow Southerners, Whig or Democrat, who put their own interests ahead of the Union or their state. Although Toombs was a defender of slavery, he broke with his fellow Southerners to oppose President Polk and his Mexican War. He knew and predicted that once the United States had won the Mexican War, it would lead to "the acquisition of Mexican territory and that would precipitate a disastrous

²³ *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 71.

argument on slavery.”²⁴ He defended slavery and the rights of the South, but he saw the need to protect the Union more. After the Mexican American War, Toombs accepted the territorial gains of the United States and the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny and became an unyielding champion of the rights of the South in the newly acquired territory.²⁵

Toombs’s emergence as a champion of the South’s right in this new territory did not automatically align him with Davis and the radical states’ rights advocates. Davis and Toombs disagreed on many issues that led up the Civil War. Toombs supported the Compromise of 1850, California entering the Union as a free state, popular sovereignty in the New Mexico Territory, and the banning of the slave trade in the District of Columbia.²⁶ Jefferson Davis opposed all of these measures that Toombs worked so hard to defend. Toombs also opposed John Calhoun’s creation of a sectional Southern party in 1849 because, in Toombs’ view, any party that was not continental in sweep was not a true party of the American republic.²⁷ In the years leading up to the Civil War, Toombs referred to any man who was undermining the existing national system in America as “bad men and traitors.”²⁸ This strong, genuine sense of unionism dominated Toombs’ political thinking and career during the 1840s and 1850s. However, as the nation became more divided on slavery, Toombs and other Southern defenders of unionism began to change their minds.

The nation was a very different place in 1860 than ten years earlier following the victory over the Mexican forces. The rise of the Republican Party and its growing calls

²⁴ Ibid, 74.

²⁵ Ibid, 74.

²⁶ Ibid, 74-75.

²⁷ Ibid, 75.

²⁸ Ibid, 75.

for the destruction of slavery, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the Dred Scott ruling, John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, and the final blow of Lincoln's election in 1860 all contributed to the drastic change that occurred in the United States in the ten years before the war. All of these factors also changed Robert Toombs' views on unionism and Southern rights as well.

Toombs left the Senate in January 1861 after delivering a heated speech in which he branded Abraham Lincoln "an enemy of the human race and deserves execration of all mankind."²⁹ Toombs became one of the most outspoken members of secession by the winter of 1860 into 1861. He reversed his defense of the Constitution and argued that the South was better off without it. His final statement in the United States Senate called for war against the Union and declared that his home state of Georgia is "on a war path," and that Georgia and the South are "ready to fight now as we have ever shall be!"³⁰ He then stormed out of the chamber, went to the Treasury Department and demanded his salary and mileage compensation and took it all back to Georgia. Soon after his explosive resignation, later that month in fact, Georgia left the Union on January 19, 1861 with Toombs leading the call for secession in Georgia. This outspoken loyalty to the secession movement and to his home state along with his reputation and statesman-like quality led Davis to appoint Toombs to be his Secretary of State after his election.

Toombs was not the only Confederate secretary of state during the Civil War. He resigned on July 24, 1861 in a letter to Jefferson Davis. Toombs left the Davis Cabinet because "duty calls me to the battlefield." He and Davis, Toombs insisted, "never had a

²⁹ Ibid, 79.

³⁰ Ibid, 79-80.

single difference of opinion in any degree affecting the public interest.”³¹ Despite his early departure from the Davis administration, Toombs set the course for Confederate foreign policy and took the early steps to gain European recognition. He got to work right away after his appointment. It would be his job to forge friendly relationships with the European Powers, primarily France and England, in the hopes of guaranteeing European recognition of the Confederate States of America.

When Toombs left government work for the glory of the battlefield, Robert Hunter was appointed the new Confederate Secretary of State. The news of Toombs’ resignation did not make headlines in either the South or the North; the battles were still stealing the front pages. A few brief mentions of the change up in the cabinet was all the press coverage given to this massive change in Confederate diplomacy. A newspaper in Warrenton, Virginia, however, was elated to see a Virginian in one of the most powerful positions in the Confederate government. They praised Hunter, “who has long been conspicuous for his profound statesmanship, philosophic temperament and varied learning, will conduct the diplomatic affairs of the Government with the same masterly ability which has illustrated his official acts during the long period of his public career.”³² There had been a demand for restructuring the cabinet since the Montgomery Convention. Several new states were now added to the Confederacy, and the most important among them was Virginia. It would be the state where the Confederate government would be located, and the state, with all its wealth and grandeur, needed to be represented in the cabinet as soon as possible. That made the choice easy for Davis

³¹ Toombs to Davis, July 24, 1861, in *Papers of Jefferson Davis 1861*, vol. VII, eds., Lynda Lasswell Crist and Mary Seaton Dix, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 266.

³² “Cabinet Changes,” *Warrenton Flag of '98*, August 1, 1861.

when he selected Hunter to replace Toombs.³³ His selection was widely popular and accepted across the South.

Hunter was indeed a man with a long and vocal history of public service. He was born in 1809 in Virginia, a state which he served his entire life and eventually swear allegiance to when Virginia voted to leave the Union. He began his political life at age twenty-six when he was elected to the Virginia House of Representatives. From there, Hunter served in the House of Representatives in 1837 and as Speaker in 1839.³⁴ He rose with speed and distinction in the public light. In 1847, Hunter served as a Senator from Virginia until his resignation in 1861 after the secession of his home state. He was not an avid secessionist like Davis. Hunter was in favor of a peaceful resolution between the North and South. Rather than secession, Hunter pushed for a Southern convention to establish new constitutional amendments to guarantee Southern rights and security over their property.³⁵ But, despite this desire to keep the Union as a whole, Hunter was selected as part of the Virginia delegation sent to Montgomery when Virginia seceded. For Hunter, as for so many in the Confederacy, state loyalty trumped loyalty to one's nation.

Hunter would not drastically alter the course of Confederate direction to the diplomats already stationed overseas put into place by Toombs. His focus still centered on bringing England and France in on the side of the Confederacy. However, as time passed, and little progress was made by the commissioners, it became clear to Hunter that a swift recognition of the Confederacy by the major powers in Europe was slipping

³³ Rembert Patrick, *Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944), 90.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 90-91.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 91.

through his fingers. Hunter, despite serving as the secretary of state for a very short time, still managed to set up connections with Spain, and he started to focus on bringing England into the conflict based on Union maritime policy and the blockade on Southern ports. Hunter's desire to leave his position would be the same as his predecessor; the job was not meaningful or exciting in his mind.³⁶ Hunter rose to fame and political importance in the United States Senate, and he missed the excitement of politics in that chamber. Hunter resigned in February 1862 and joined the Confederate Senate. Neither Toombs nor Hunter could see the importance of their position in the Confederate government. The Southern drive for glory and honor blinded both men. The honor and prestige that is associated with the military, especially in Southern culture, as well as the more active and hands-on political atmosphere of the Senate was too much of a temptation. Davis needed a secretary of state who was confident in their ability, knowledgeable, and well rounded. Someone who Davis could trust and rely on. He found all of those qualities in Judah Benjamin.

Judah Benjamin was born in St. Croix on August 11, 1811. His family emigrated to the United States, and Benjamin ended up in Louisiana after college at Yale. His political career began in 1842 in the lower house of the Louisiana State Assembly as a Whig.³⁷ However, his real passion was practicing law. This was his occupation prior to jumping into politics. He made his money at his law office and his sugar plantation, the Bellechasse.³⁸ Benjamin was elected to the state senate, where he worked alongside John Slidell, in 1853, and would serve in that office until secession. He began to see the fading

³⁶ *Ibid*, 97.

³⁷ *Jefferson Davis*, 156.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 156.

popularity and strength of the Whig Party, and in 1856, he formally made the switch to the Democratic Party.³⁹ This relatively recent switch to the Democratic Party, in the context of the secession movement, made Benjamin a late-comer to secession politics. He avidly defended Southern honor and rights and was in favor of the move to withdraw his state of Louisiana from the Union. Once Louisiana seceded, Benjamin retired to his law practice until Davis nominated him for the position of attorney general.⁴⁰

In the realm of Confederate politics, no man was as qualified as Judah P. Benjamin. He became known as the “brains of the Confederacy” due to his skill and abilities working within the Davis administration. Benjamin would have to pick up the pieces of Confederate foreign policy where Hunter had left them. He was not new to the Davis administration or even the Davis cabinet. He began his Confederate political career as the first attorney general, appointed on February 25, 1861.⁴¹ In September 1861, after the resignation of LeRoy Walker, Benjamin was appointed to the position of secretary of war. He served in that post until the resignation of Hunter in 1862.

As secretary of state, Benjamin was fighting an uphill battle. The expectations that France and England would quickly recognize the Confederacy were fading rapidly, and the new secretary of state could see it as well. When he first took office, Benjamin did not want to alter from the course set by his predecessor. His main reason for this was not his love for the policies, but rather the difficulty the Confederates were having in communicating with the commissioners in Europe. Benjamin feared making drastic policy changes due to this difficulty.⁴² This was a major setback for the South because

³⁹ *Ibid*, 156.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 157.

⁴¹ Robert Douthat Meade, *Judah P. Benjamin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), 161.

⁴² *Ibid*, 247.

their current strategy of King Cotton Diplomacy and asserting their Southern right to secession was not winning over the hearts and minds of either the French or the British. Eventually Benjamin changed the tactic of his commissioners. His new focus, using his background in law, focused on the illegality of the Union blockade against the South and that recognition by England and France would bring peace, not further war with the Union.⁴³ Benjamin charted a new course for foreign relations in the Confederate States of America. A much-needed revitalization of policy and instruction would be handed down from Benjamin. However, the slow and spotty communication between himself and his commissioners along with the Southern belief that the cotton trade was their saving grace thwarted the plans of Benjamin.

Benjamin was a prime example of how much of a revolving door the Davis cabinet really was. The secretary of state, one of the key offices in the Confederacy to securing Southern independence, could not operate effectively because of the seemingly constant changes at its head. Over the course of two years, the secretary of state position saw three chiefs. Each new incoming director tried their best to pick up where the previous director had left off. It was incredibly inefficient and disastrous for the overall Confederate foreign policy. In the age of letters and slow communication between the North America and Europe, this continual change of leadership in the state department made it near impossible to have effective and clear directions for the Confederate agents on the ground. They were left to do the brunt of the work without their boss back in Richmond. Yes, each secretary of state contacted Confederate commissioners overseas. However, it was vital to the success of the Confederacy to secure an alliance with the

⁴³ *Jefferson Davis*, 183.

major powers in Europe and the revolving door in and out of the state department made that already monumental task that much more complicated.

Chapter Two:

Negotiations in North America: Setting the Stage for Europe

The Confederacy needed a quick war to defeat the Union, and European recognition was the way to guarantee that victory. European recognition, Confederates hoped, would help them break the Union blockade that was starving and strangling the Confederacy, put pressure on the Union from multiple fronts, and allow the Davis administration some leverage over the Union at the negotiating table. Davis and the Confederate cabinet members thought recognition would be easy. The South had massive economic ties with England and France and cordial relations with Mexico. Davis and his diplomats understood the importance of their foreign relations missions to the Great Powers of Europe. Their survival depended on it. Despite the grave importance of their mission, however, the Davis cabinet and the diplomats sent to Mexico were overconfident and did not care to understand the Mexicans. This spelled the end for the mission before it ever began. Union diplomats were determined to keep Mexico out of the hands of the Confederacy, and they had the patience, time, and money to do so.

Davis and Toombs sent the first Confederate foreign diplomatic mission, not to Europe, but to Mexico. The odds looked good in early 1861 for a Confederate diplomatic victory in Mexico. Davis, at the request of John Forsyth, the American minister to Mexico in the years leading up to the Civil War, appointed John Pickett as a special agent to represent the Confederate government in Mexico. According to the letter that accompanied that request, Forsyth boasted that Pickett was “admirably qualified for such a mission.” Forsyth also noted that Pickett’s “knowledge of Mexican character, its language and its public men, his well-known Southern loyalty and personal chivalry

recommended him as eminently suitable to fill a position so delicate and important as this.”⁴⁴ A graduate of West Point, Pickett resigned his army post for an exciting life as a diplomat.

On May 17, 1861, Pickett received a letter that contained his formal post as the Confederate commissioner to Mexico and his diplomatic instructions from Toombs. Pickett was to “assure them [Mexico] of the readiness of this Government to conclude a treaty of amity, commerce, and navigation with that Republic on terms equally advantageous to both countries.”⁴⁵ The Confederacy hoped that their diplomats could sway the Mexican government from the influence of the Union and open up trade relations with the South. Toombs was a smart diplomat when it came to the instructions for Pickett. In his letter informing Pickett of his new role as Confederate commissioner to Mexico, Toombs went into extensive detail on why the Mexican government should align with the South. Pickett was instructed to emphasize and note that both Mexico and the Confederates are “principally engaged in agriculture and mining pursuits, and their interests are therefore homogeneous.”⁴⁶ Toombs evoked a communal sense of agriculture as leverage over the Union’s increased use of railroads and very early stages of industrialization. The Confederacy could also protect Mexico from foreign invasion with an alliance, and it “is obvious that they [the Confederacy] could do so more promptly and effectively than any more distant nation.”⁴⁷ With this bond established, Toombs instructed Pickett to convince the Mexican government to put its faith in the Confederate

⁴⁴ Forsyth to Davis March 20, 1861, in *The Papers of Jefferson Davis 1861*, 75-76.

⁴⁵ Toombs to Pickett, May 17, 1861, in *The Messages and Papers of Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy: Including Diplomatic Correspondence, 1861-1865*, vol. II ed., James D. Richardson (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1966), 21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 21.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 21.

army and strategy for winning the war. This was a tall order for Pickett since the Confederate army had yet to prove itself in battle at the time Toombs penned the instructions to Pickett; it would be another two months until the battle of First Bull Run, the first major conflict of the war.

The unstable and poor nation of Mexico hardly appeared a likely candidate for a Confederate diplomatic mission for recognition. Mexico's instability played into the hands of the Confederates because "no country enjoyed less respect or influence in the foreign offices of the world, and none seemed less likely to be flattered by a proud young people, like the Confederacy, seeking international standing."⁴⁸ Pickett and Toombs tried to strike a chord with the Mexican government by relating the Confederate struggles with the Union to the Mexican quarrels with the Spanish. Pickett was the man responsible for opening the door with Mexico then, in turn, opening a door with the European powers. The planned diplomatic attack was not a frontal assault on Paris or London, but a backdoor approach through Mexico City.⁴⁹

The European powers retained a vested interest in Mexico ever since the Spanish left in 1821. Mexico was the jewel of Central America and its resources highly desired by the English and the French, primarily. The Mexican government, constantly in turmoil and upheaval, was in massive debt to the European powers. The powers of Europe wanted their cash back from Mexico and decided that they knew how to run the country better than the Mexicans did. After all, since the departure of the Spanish in 1821, the Mexican government went through seventy-five presidents.⁵⁰ The Mexican government

⁴⁸ *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 109.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 109.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 108.

showed no signs of stabilizing either. The most formidable opponent to the European plans for Mexico was the United States. Americans had already shown their desire for land in the New World. Their massive land grab in the Mexican-American War reaffirmed the European belief that America was a growing economic threat. The Monroe Doctrine was another obstacle to the European plans for Mexico. Many European leaders and governments had dismissed the Doctrine when it was first announced in 1823. However, as the United States continued to expand west to the Pacific Ocean and grow its economy, Europeans took the Doctrine more seriously. It was not stopping any European power, but it was certainly something to consider. The *New York Herald* called the European plans for Mexico “direct infringement of the Monroe doctrine, threatening the very existence of a sister republican constitution, and likely to vitally affect the integrity of the republican form of government.”⁵¹ Because the Americans were engulfed in a Civil War, the European plans for Mexico were back on the table. Americans, too occupied with their blockade of the East Coast, would not be focused on European fleets entering and leaving the Gulf of Mexico. Of the European powers, the French, under Napoleon III, had the greatest hopes and plans for Mexico. France had seen the turbulent Mexican governments fail time and time again. To restore glory to France and rebuild the French Empire, Napoleon III and his noble Spanish wife Eugénie, drafted up plans of an invasion of Mexico that placed Archduke Maximilian of Hapsburg, second in line for the Austro-Hungarian throne, on the throne in Mexico to establish a stable, European government in Mexico.⁵² With a weakened, distracted U.S. government, the French realized their opportunity to pursue their plan. In the view of the Europeans, secession

⁵¹ “Expedition to Mexico,” *New York Herald* November 30, 1861.

⁵² *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 112.

turned the Monroe Doctrine back into a laughable document. A divided America could not stand up to the massive European fleets or armies looking to encroach into Central and South America.

The Confederacy saw the opportunity to capitalize on diplomacy during this time as well. The necessities of war and conflict brought the Confederates and French very close. In 1861 any enemy of the U.S. federal government, wherever they were found, were destined to become friends with the Confederacy. Davis and Toombs had something concrete to offer Napoleon III, and the French had much to offer the Confederacy in return. If the Confederate States of America could get the French to recognize their independence, England was sure to follow because France and Great Britain acted as a single unit in the American crisis. They both sent a joint delegation to Washington after both nations declared the Confederacy a belligerent in the war, one step shy of recognition. They acted in unison in the possible recognition of the Confederacy as an independent nation.⁵³ This infuriated William Seward, the American Secretary of State. Lord Lyons and M. Mercier, English and French ministers to the United States, requested an audience with Seward and demanded they be met with together. This was unacceptable to Seward and Lincoln. Meeting with them together would only reassure their commitment to join forces if the South were to be recognized.

To Jefferson Davis and Robert Toombs, the news that England and France worked closely with one another during the American crisis was welcomed. If Toombs could get the French to recognize the Confederacy as independent, that might bring in the much more valuable prize, England. To achieve this goal, Toombs would have to

⁵³ Ibid, 115.

promote the Napoleonic scheme in Mexico. Even though this was a quicker solution to the recognition issue that plagued the Confederacy, endorsing a European scheme to place a monarch on the throne of a nation in the western hemisphere, a region of the world that has always cast them out, would go against the entire American way and the American system and tradition. And, on top of all that, the European monarch would be placed right on the border with the Confederate States of America—another concerning issue. Despite George Washington’s famous insistence that America was very distinct from Europe and its ideas and President Monroe’s outspoken opposition to any extension of European influence into the New World, Toombs and Davis were willing to oppose the ideals of fellow Southerners Washington and Monroe and make those concessions.⁵⁴

Mexico was torn apart by yet another Civil War when Pickett arrived. Benito Juárez was the leader of the liberal, anticlerical popular majority. His party was in opposition against the Conservatives; they composed of property owners and good churchmen, devoted to the restoration of the hierarchy and its ravished lands.⁵⁵ The United States government formally recognized the Juárez regime as the legitimate government in Mexico after Juárez defeated the Conservatives, led by Zuloaga. This was bad news for Pickett and Toombs. If Zuloaga were to have won the Civil War, the prospects of Mexican recognition of the Confederacy and the restoration of a European monarch on the throne of Mexico would have improved dramatically. Davis and Toombs decided to send Pickett despite their political setbacks in Mexico. They still needed that relationship with the Mexican government to ensure victory over the Union. Forsyth noted in a March 20, 1861 letter to Davis that “recognition by Mexico would follow that

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 116.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 116.

of European powers as a matter of course.”⁵⁶ Pickett would not be working alone in his mission to Mexico; John Forsyth of Alabama and John Slidell of Louisiana joined him. Pickett was no stranger to Mexico either. He left the army and bounced around the Caribbean before landing as the United States consul at Vera Cruz between 1856 and 1859.⁵⁷ These three men were among the most qualified men in North America to take on Mexico. And luckily for the Confederacy, all three of these men joined the secession movement and resign from their posts in the United States government to join Jefferson Davis.

The Confederates needed to establish open and friendly relations with the people of Mexico as soon as possible. They wanted to be in Mexico City and have a relationship with the Mexican government before the Americans could gain any sort of diplomatic advantage over the Confederates.⁵⁸ The American diplomat sent from Washington D.C. arrived in Mexico soon after Pickett. The Union sent Thomas Corwin to Mexico to thwart any attempt by the Confederacy to establish a relationship with Mexico.⁵⁹ In his instructions from Seward, Corwin was to “not allude to the origin or causes of our domestic difficulties in your intercourse with the government of Mexico.”⁶⁰ Seward and Lincoln thought it best to downplay difficulties at home in order to help Union diplomats on the ground. This fact was also mentioned to undermine any efforts by the Confederacy

⁵⁶ Forsyth to Davis, March 20, 1861, in *The Papers of Jefferson Davis 1861*, 75.

⁵⁷ *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 118.

⁵⁸ James Morton Callahan, *Diplomatic History of the Southern Confederacy* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1964), 71.

⁵⁹ *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 120.

⁶⁰ Seward to Corwin, April 6, 1861 in United States Department of State. *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: Mexico*. Vol. I. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 66.

to establish a bond between the Confederates and Mexico. Corwin was the one man the Confederacy did not want Lincoln and Seward to appoint to Mexico. Pickett hated Corwin with a burning passion. Like Pickett, Corwin was from Kentucky. However, Corwin moved to the North and served as the Governor of Ohio in 1840 and secretary of the treasury under President Fillmore. Corwin quickly became an outspoken critic of slavery; his name was detested throughout the South.⁶¹ Corwin took his antislavery rhetoric a step further when he was elected to the Senate in 1845. There he attacked President Polk and his actions and motives during the Mexican-American War. Corwin's outspoken nature won him favor in the North, but he was labeled a traitor in the South.⁶² Pickett had Central American experience, but his affiliation with the Confederacy proved to be a handicap. The South dreamed of having a Central American and Caribbean empire once they gained their independence. Mexico took note of this and remembered this when Pickett arrived.⁶³

Corwin was charming, a born diplomat. His challenge to the Mexican-American War in the late 1840s helped his case dramatically. The Mexicans took to Corwin almost instantly. The President of Mexico, Juárez, officially received Corwin on May 21st, 1861 and beamed during his reception of Corwin, stating with great certainty "the desires of the Government and the people of the United States of America for the prosperity and well-being of the Government and the people of Mexico...are truly grateful because I am convinced of their sincerity, and I recognize that they are dictated by a noble and generous interest."⁶⁴ Pickett had to convince the Mexican government that Davis was not

⁶¹ *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 120.

⁶² *Ibid*, 121.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 122.

⁶⁴ "Reception of Hon. Thomas Corwin by President Juarez," *Chicago Tribune*, June 27, 1861.

the threat; Lincoln and the Union were the ones to fear. Pickett and the Confederacy could offer greater protection to Mexico than the Union could. The Mexican-Confederate boarder was the only part of the Confederate coast not covered by the federal blockade. It could be here that supplies could be smuggled into the Confederacy and cotton and other exports could be shipped to Europe from Mexico.⁶⁵ The Confederates also had some leverage over the Mexicans. Across that same frontier that goods could be shipped and traded, troops could be moved as well. Pickett wanted to be friendly but forceful with the Mexicans. As an opening gesture, he drafted a letter comparing Mexico and the Confederacy in order to persuade Mexico that Davis and the South were not the hostile, dangerous ones. Pickett noted how uprisings in both nations were founded in political freedom from an oppressive government.⁶⁶ Pickett's letter was picked up by the Mexicans five days later. He was granted a personal, not official, audience with Zamacona, the Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, at his home.⁶⁷ In his seven months in the country, that was his only interview with a Mexican official. President Juárez never met with the Confederate delegation, and his ministers gave the Confederates a wide berth as well. Pickett managed to set up a meeting with a Mexican official but had not obtained anything even closely resembling an alliance or trade agreement with Mexico. The main reason Juárez resisted meeting with the Confederates was because he was busy meeting with Corwin on a regular basis. The Confederates could give the Mexicans promises and hopes, but the Union could give the Mexicans what they really needed, money. Seward noted that Mexico, "instead of being benefited by the prostration or

⁶⁵ *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 123.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 124.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 125.

obstruction of federal authority in this country, would be exposed by it to new and fearful dangers.”⁶⁸ Those dangers included internal struggle within Mexico. However, the Confederates were the real danger, according to Seward and Corwin.

Juárez and his government were not huge supporters of either the Union or the Confederacy. Both sides of the Potomac were “gringos and therefore obnoxious to patriotic Mexicans,” claimed historian Burton Henrick.⁶⁹ The Union understood that for good, effective diplomacy to work, Corwin could not play into that stereotype. In a letter to Seward on June 29, 1861, Corwin remarked that Mexico regards “the United States as its true and only reliable friend in any struggle which may involve the national existence.”⁷⁰ Corwin went on to say how remarkable that is with the “deep prejudices engendered in the general Mexican mind by the loss of Texas, which they attribute to our citizens, and the compulsory cession of territory which was a consequence of our war with them.”⁷¹ Corwin was shocked when the Mexican government even talked to him because of the strained past relationship between the United States and Mexico. This realization went a long way in the negotiations. Juárez also worked with Corwin because the Union had money that could potentially save him from European creditors. Mexico had defaulted on its debts to England and France and had no hope of repaying them. Juárez, in fact, had little control over Mexico. Opposition was still a threat and his people were divided on his rule. Tax money and trade revenue were not enough to balance the

⁶⁸ Seward to Corwin, April 6, 1861 in United States Department of State. *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: Mexico*. Vol. I. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 66.

⁶⁹ *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 125.

⁷⁰ Corwin to Seward, May 29, 1861 in *Message of the President Instructions and Dispatches: Mexico*, 70.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 70.

budget, let alone pay the Europeans back. This offered the justification the European powers were waiting for. They drew up a Convention with Spain for the seizure of Mexican ports.⁷²

Corwin and Seward knew this played into the hands of the Confederacy if this were to happen. Why not cut the Europeans off at the pass? Seward sent Corwin a note telling him to work out a loan to Mexico from the United States for the liquidation of the European debts. This money would pay back the Europeans, reestablish domestic order, and make the Mexican government indebted to the Union. The agreement would not “require the United States to assume any portion of the principle or interest of the debt of Mexico or require the concurrence of the European powers.”⁷³ To ensure security of repayment, Corwin added that the Mexican government gave over all public land and mineral assets to the Americans as security. The treaty also included the Americans right to seize those assets and the Mexican states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Lower California, and Chihuahua if the Mexican government could not repay the loan within six years.⁷⁴ There was no possible way that Mexico would be able to repay the loans in six years, but Juárez agreed. The treaty never went into effect, however. It was blocked by Congress because the Federal Treasury was already overburdened, and England and France would not agree to the terms.⁷⁵ Still, even though this treaty was never signed or implemented, it was still extremely valuable to the Union. The negotiations took over a year, and in that time,

⁷² *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 126.

⁷³ Seward to Corwin, June 7, 1862 in United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: Mexico* Vol. I (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1862), 748.

⁷⁴ *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 127.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 128.

Juárez became more aligned to the Union with each passing day. Each day he met with Corwin, he did not meet with Pickett. Also, the treaty blocked any hope of a Confederate or European domination of Mexico or Central America. Corwin held the prospect of ready money in front of Juárez the entire time he was in Mexico. The Americans remained in control of the situation and the proceedings.

To add insult to injury for Pickett, none of his correspondence had been reaching Toombs back in the Confederacy. For over half of a year, Pickett's superiors had no idea what was going on in one of the most important nations in the world for Confederate success. As part of the deal struck between Corwin and Juárez, the Mexican authorities stopped mail between the Confederate delegation in Mexico and the Confederate government.⁷⁶ In essence, Pickett accomplished nothing in his seven months in Mexico. He managed to gain only one audience with a Mexican official, he was diplomatically outmaneuvered by Corwin, and none of his reports reached Toombs or Davis. After word reached the delegation of the battle of Bull Run, Southerners in Mexico rejoiced; meanwhile, the Union citizens in Mexico had little to celebrate. Pickett took offense ~~of~~ at some of the things being said by some Yankees and got into an altercation with "an unlucky pill-vendor named Bennett."⁷⁷ Pickett slapped him with the back of his hand. This Southern gesture soon turned into a brawl. As a member of a diplomatic delegation, Pickett assumed he would be treated with respect and be ordered to leave the country. However, the Mexican government ordered an armed detail to arrest Pickett at his home and treated him as an ordinary street brawler.⁷⁸ He was thrown in jail and after twenty-

⁷⁶ Ibid, 129.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 135.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 136.

four hours ordered to apologize to Bennett. This apology plus an indemnity would have set Pickett free. However, Pickett refused and spent the next thirty days in the city jail. He eventually bought his freedom and returned north as fast as he could. This humiliation amounted to the perfect end to the Confederate attempts at recognition through Mexico. His mission was a failure, and the Confederate hopes for recognition also ended in failure.

Mexico was not the only target Davis and Toombs sent diplomats to in North America. Toombs and the state department cast a massive net in terms of targets selected for possible diplomatic relations, arguably too wide of a net. Like the mission to Mexico, the Confederacy stuck close to home and sent a delegation to the major Native American tribes on the western border of the Confederacy. At first, Toombs and Davis had little concern for these tribes. In the larger diplomatic mission of the Confederacy, the tribes on the western frontier were insignificant and on the periphery. Despite their remoteness, Albert Pike, a charismatic Indian lawyer, originally from Massachusetts before moving west to Arkansas, managed to convince both Davis and Toombs of the importance the Native Americans could be to the Confederacy.

Albert Pike was born on December 29, 1809 in Boston. His family soon moved to his father's hometown of Newburyport, Massachusetts.⁷⁹ Pike was charming, intelligent, and ready for adventure. As he grew older, his sense of adventure and desire for ambition grew as well. He left Massachusetts in 1831 for St. Louis, and in 1834, Pike found himself in Little Rock, Arkansas. Here, Pike "proved himself adept in the political arena,

⁷⁹ Robert Duncan, *The Reluctant General: The Life and Times of Albert Pike* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1961), 14.

and he also became a social lion in the village of Little Rock.”⁸⁰ As Pike grew in popularity, he began writing articles for the *Arkansas Advocate*; Pike became so successful writing for the *Advocate*, he bought the newspaper in 1834. The ambitious Pike, although a successful newspaper man, wanted more. This desire for furthering his wealth and influence led Pike to the office of Judge Tomas Lacy of the Superior Court of Arkansas. Pike requested a license from Judge Lacy to practice law. Lacy promptly awarded Pike his license and remarked “granting a legal license was not like issuing a medical diploma, and Pike could not kill anyone by practicing law.”⁸¹ With this new license, Pike threw himself into the territory-wide battle of statehood and what kind of a state Arkansas would be, slave or free. Although Pike was born in Boston, he wooed the wealthy planter class of southern Arkansas. He knew that this section of the Arkansas population was influential and very wealthy. Pike aligned himself with these elite members of society to increase his own standing. Pike became more and more noticed and popular with his public fight for a slave Arkansas and representing the planters’ interests. During the debates at the convention, Pike saw the inaction and stalemates between the slaveholders and non-slaveholders. He proposed a solution that he hoped would end the bickering and get Arkansas admitted into the Union. His plan was that state representatives be elected based on the free white male population, but the state senate-be formed based on districts to give the southern part of the state greater power.⁸² The convention adopted his plan, and Arkansas was admitted to the Union on June 15, 1836.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 73.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 84.

⁸² *Ibid*, 88.

After this success, Pike sold his newspaper to work on his law practice full time. Although Pike represented poorer clients, he focused his main efforts on the wealthy planters, keeping those connections he had made during the statehood debates. These planters kept Pike very busy in the years following statehood, and between 1837 and 1839, Pike participated in 23 out of the 71 cases brought before the Arkansas Supreme Court.⁸³ He became well versed in Arkansas law and well-integrated into Arkansas' wealthy planter society. Despite his wealthy clientele, Pike needed to expand his client base to make money. When Arkansas entered the Union in 1836, the United States was headed for a financial panic the following year. The newly formed state suffered greatly during the panic and under the questionable leadership of President Andrew Jackson. The wealthy planter class was severely damaged by the panic in 1837. To make matters worse for the already struggling planters, in 1848, there was a severe drought, the following year, there was a flood, and in 1850, the cotton was planted late due to a spring frost.⁸⁴ For three seasons the cotton crop was virtually destroyed in Arkansas on top of the damage caused by the panic in 1837. Being a resourceful and opportunistic man, Pike turned to the Native Americans to pad out his wallet while the planters got back on their feet. In his circuit travels as a lawyer, Pike encountered Native Americans and their legal battles with both the U.S. government and state government before. He even "prided himself on the knowledge of the Indian character and language. He was so well liked by the Indians that one of the tribes made him an honorary chief."⁸⁵ It was this knowledge and experience with the Native Americans that influenced both Toombs and Jefferson.

⁸³ Ibid, 99.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 151.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 152.

Pike was both an experienced lawyer and knew his way around the western frontier, both needed in his work with the Davis administration.

Arkansas left the Union on May 6, 1861 after President Lincoln called for troops to put down the rebellion. Despite Pike being born in the North, his very close ties with the planter class and wealthy landowners in Arkansas compelled him to side with Arkansas' decision to secede from the Union. Under the new Confederate Constitution and the newly elected President Davis, the Confederate Bureau of Indian Affairs was created; it was a subdivision under the war department. Its goal was to monitor and negotiate relations with the Native Americans located in the Confederacy. At its creation, the bureau "was placed under the direction of the Hon. David Hubbard, as Commissioner. So far this Bureau has found but little to do."⁸⁶ This letter was sent in April 1861 and since Arkansas would not join the Confederacy until May 1861, the war department, as well as the state department, feared that the new bureau would be a waste of resources and manpower that could be of use elsewhere in the Confederacy. After Arkansas left the Union, this bureau proved vital in the management and forging of relationships with the Native American tribes in the Confederacy, mainly the Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws. Walker stressed that these were the most important Native American tribes that the Confederacy had to befriend, or at least persuade them to remain neutral during the war. He also looked to the future of the Confederacy and saw the potential importance of the bureau establishing "future relations with the Territories of Arizona and New Mexico."⁸⁷ The Confederacy was confident in any area of government at the

⁸⁶ Walker to Davis, April 27, 1861, in Fred C. Ainsworth, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies: 1861-1865*, vol. I, IV (Washington, D.C.: War Department, Record and Pension Office, 1900), 248.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 248.

outbreak of the Civil War. The idea that Sec. Walker had his sights on the West so early in 1861 shows his level of confidence and faith in the Confederate cause.

Pike was the most successful Confederate commissioner of the war. Unlike his counterparts in Mexico or Europe, Pike secured a total of eight treaties, all of which were ratified by the Confederate Congress. Pike accomplished negotiating the treaties and pushing them through the Confederate Congress by December 1861. He and his team were masters at what they did. None of these treaties helped the Confederacy win recognition, however. They were treaties of friendship and alliances between the Confederacy and the Native Americans. From the perspective of recognition, Pike was just as unsuccessful as his counterparts. However, based on the diplomatic success of securing treaties with other nations/peoples, Pike was far and away a total success.

Pike's greatest accomplishment and most important treaty he negotiated was with the Cherokee Nation and their chief, John Ross. The treaty was signed on October 7, 1861. The main purpose of the treaty was to agree on "perpetual peace and friendship, and an alliance, offensive and defensive, between the Confederate States of America and all of their States and people, and the Cherokee Nation and all of the people thereof."⁸⁸ Although this treaty was not a formal treaty of recognition, the fact the Confederacy was not viewed as a rebellion in the eyes of the Cherokee was a step in the right direction. However, the Confederacy was not looking for recognition from the Native Americans. Their opinion, in the grand scheme of international diplomacy and law, did not matter when compared with England or France. Similar to the United States' treaties with the

⁸⁸ "Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with the Cherokee Nation of Indians," Fred C. Ainsworth, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies: 1861-1865*, vol. I, IV (Washington, D.C.: War Department, Record and Pension Office, 1900), 670.

Native American tribes, Pike made sure that the Cherokee were “under the protection of the Confederate States of America, and of no other sovereign power whatsoever.”⁸⁹

These established protectorate states ensured the United States, or the Confederacy, would be the only nations to control and protect the Native Americans. The treaty also protected slavery in the Cherokee Nation and remained “legal and has existed from time immemorial.”⁹⁰ Pike wanted to show that the Confederacy was the right choice for the Cherokee Nation going forward. With the treaty signed and ratified by the Confederate Congress on December 11, 1861, Pike had cemented open and friendly communication with the Native American tribes on the western frontier. The Native Americans provided some troops and assistance to the Confederacy during the war. That support and friendship was rooted in the treaties Pike signed with numerous tribes.

The Confederate diplomatic missions in North America were an important precursor to the main event in Europe. Both Mexico and the Native American tribes were easily accessible and important early tests of Confederate diplomacy. Of the two missions, the Mexico delegation was vastly more important for the ultimate Confederate goal of recognition. That mission was a testing ground for the strategy of the Confederate State Department. Ultimately, it was a failure. But, the early successes of the treaties with the Native Americans gave false hope to Davis and the state department.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 670.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 678.

Chapter Three: The Failure in France and The Russian Regret

With the mission in Mexico underway and spirits high in the new government, the main thrust of Confederate diplomacy began: the mission to Europe. Unlike Mexico or the Native Americans, the Confederacy needed European support diplomatically with official recognition and public support, military support with the supply of arms, ships, and intervention, and economic assistance with trade agreements to supply and feed the new nation. Davis and the state department knew the importance of the mission. However, Davis' background in the military and domestic politics led him to focus on those aspects of the Confederacy, rather than the dozens of commissioners sent out to conduct diplomacy. This lack of attention from Davis and constant rotation of secretaries of state in Richmond led to a poor and often foggy foreign policy that hindered commissioners in the field.

The two main targets in Europe were France and England. They were the two major powers in Europe during the 1860s and were the most able to assist the Confederacy in securing independence. However, the Confederates had commissioners in a multitude of other European nations fighting for the Cause. Belgium, Spain, Russia, and the Pope were all contacted by the Confederates during the war. Toombs wanted to cast a wide net in order to increase the likelihood of recognition from abroad. This was a good strategy in theory. However, it stretched the already limited Confederate resources to their limits.

On July 24, 1861, Robert Hunter was confirmed as the new Confederate secretary of state to replace Robert Toombs. One month later, Hunter appointed John Slidell as the

Confederate commissioner to France. Slidell was praised by both Davis and Hunter. In a rousing endorsement of Slidell and his mission, Davis wrote, “for the purpose of stabling friendly relations between the Confederate States and the Empire of France, and reposing special trust and confidence in the integrity of prudence, and abilities of the Hon. John Slidell, I have appointed him special commissioner of the Confederate States to the Empire of France.”⁹¹ Along with this general letter intended for French Foreign Office officials, Davis sent a personal note to the French Emperor, Napoleon III. Davis described Slidell as “one of our most intelligent, esteemed, and worthy citizens.”⁹² Davis hoped Slidell would cultivate friendly relations with the French Emperor and the foreign minister, Édouard Antoine de Thouvenel. The new secretary of state also penned a rousing endorsement of Slidell in his letter accompanying Slidell’s credentials. Hunter reinforced that Jefferson Davis is “animated by a desire to unite and bind together our respective countries by friendly ties and has appointed the Hon. John Slidell, one of our most esteemed and trustworthy citizens, as special commissioner of the Confederate States to the Government of France.”⁹³ Both Hunter and Davis looked to the French for support against the Union, and they believed John Slidell was the man who could accomplish this goal.

Before Slidell had the chance to arrive in Paris, the Union delegation was already well established, or so they thought. The American minister in France was Charles J. Faulkner. He was born in Virginia and appointed by President James Buchanan to be the

⁹¹ Jefferson Davis to all who shall see, August 24, 1861, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 112-113.

⁹² Jefferson Davis to Napoleon III, August 24, 1861, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 114.

⁹³ Hunter to French Minister of Foreign Affairs, August 24, 1861, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 113.

United States Minister to France in 1860; he served in that role until 1861. Faulkner was a pro-southern advocate and a supporter of secession. He worked on delaying the Unionist support in France. This Confederate sympathy would catch up with Faulkner. When he resigned his commission in 1861 and pledged his allegiance to the Confederate States of America, he became an enemy to the United States. The charges against Mr. Faulkner were “the successful efforts to procure arms for the rebels and the fact that he was going home to assume command of a regiment of rebels who had elected him colonel.”⁹⁴ The arrest of Faulkner “caused great excitement here [the Union]. Among Union men it is regarded with the highest favor, as indicating the final determination of the Government to prevent any further collusion between the rebels of the South and of the loyal States.”⁹⁵ Faulkner’s arrest was big news. To William Seward, the secretary of state in the Lincoln cabinet, it was disturbing. Faulkner managed to make a deal with an arms manufacturer in France to help supply the Confederates. This damaged the reputation of the Union in the court of Napoleon III. Seward quickly found a replacement for Faulkner.

The Union replacement for Faulkner was William Dayton from New Jersey. William Seward regarded Dayton’s task as “a very important foreign mission at a moment when our domestic affairs have reached a crisis.”⁹⁶ The nation had boiled over into a civil war because of, according to Dayton, “plethora and abundance.” He went on to say, during a speech in Paris, that the Confederacy is an “outbreak of a restless and

⁹⁴ “Arrest of C. J. Faulkner of Virginia, Late Minister to France,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1861.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Seward to Dayton, April 22, 1861, in United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: France*, Vol. I. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 195.

excitable people who complain substantially of nothing.”⁹⁷ Dayton saw the rebellion like a parent sees a spoiled child throwing a tantrum, unnecessary and for no good reason. The South had nothing to complain about, according to Dayton, and, since they did not get their way entirely, they were rebelling. That was not a justification, in Dayton’s view, of the South leaving the Union and starting a civil war. Dayton saw the Constitution “not as compact between states, to be broken, with or without cause, at the option of any, but it is a *nation*, treated with as such, recognized as such, by every civilized power on the face of the earth.”⁹⁸ This was a very strong and committed interpretation of the Constitution. Dayton was an adamant Unionist, unlike his predecessor Faulkner. Seward and Lincoln trusted him to do his job and support the federal government back in Washington D.C.

Dayton’s instructions came in a rambling letter from William Seward on the 22nd of April 1861. Despite the length of the letter, Seward told Corwin that the French must not support the Confederate States of America under any circumstances. Seward implored Dayton to explain to the Emperor all of the good qualities and amazing things the United States has been able to accomplish in its short lifespan. The United States “has risen from insignificance to be the second in the world. Leaving out of view unimportant local instances of conflict, we have only had two foreign wars... and not one human life has hitherto been forfeited for disloyalty to the government.”⁹⁹ Seward attempted to evoke American stability and prosperity. His viewpoint was obviously biased. However,

⁹⁷ “The American Meeting at Paris,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1861.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Seward to Dayton, April 22, 1861, in United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: France*, Vol. I. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 196.

Seward's point of American exceptionalism was part of his strategy to prevent the European powers from recognizing the Confederates. Seward also justified the South leaving the Union to himself in this letter to Dayton. He was baffled as to why the South would leave this great and prosperous Union and give up their rights in the Constitution. Seward reminded both Dayton and Napoleon III that "many nations have taken [the Constitution] as a model." France epically, Seward stated, was "built on the same broad foundation with that of this federal republic."¹⁰⁰ The United States' goal was only to prevent France from recognizing the Confederacy or intervening in any way. Lincoln "neither expects nor desires any intervention, or even any favor, from the government of France, or any other, in this emergency."¹⁰¹ Lincoln and Seward wanted Dayton to maintain the status quo antebellum between France, nothing more. Lincoln and the Union army would crush the rebellion without the support of France or any other power; the American Civil War was just that, a conflict that should be contained to America. The United States did not need any help solving its internal affairs. This was a bold claim by Lincoln, and something of a gamble. It shut the door of any possible help from a potentially sympathetic France, or any European power, in the future should the United States need it to quell the rebellion.

The French leader at the time of the Civil War was Napoleon III. He dreamed of remaking the French Empire as great as it was under Napoleon back in the early 1800s. He also dreamed of expanding the French holdings in the New World. The French foreign minister Thouvenel was a good indication of how the French public felt about the Civil War in America and of the Confederate States of America. He detested slavery, like

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 200.

most of his countrymen, was more concerned with Italian unification on his nation's border and was not troubled with the Union in turmoil thousands of miles away across the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁰² This preconceived attitude made Slidell's job that much more difficult. Another strike against Slidell was the French press. It attacked the South's use of slavery, praised the free labor in the North, and questioned secession.¹⁰³ However supportive the French press was of the North, France, at the time, was not a democracy with the freedom of the press. It was ruled by an imperial dictator who had his own newspapers and "official" news outlets. This imperial press was pro-Southern.¹⁰⁴ Napoleon III was also friends with John Slidell and his fellow Confederate commissioners. This close relationship was formed at the very arrival of Slidell and his entourage. One of Slidell's associates, Edwin Leon, proclaimed that the French Emperor was "in the house next to my hotel."¹⁰⁵ This close proximity offered Confederate diplomats easier access to the Emperor and his ministers. The French government constantly saw Slidell and met with him. This was in stark contrast to his counterpart in England, James Mason, who rarely met with English officials in either a formal or informal fashion.¹⁰⁶ Slidell had the ear of the Emperor and his ministers, but so did Dayton. Both men secured numerous appointments with Napoleon III or his ministers during the war. The success or failure of either diplomatic mission came down to personal skill and Emperor's desire to listen to either side.

¹⁰² *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 302.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Lynn Marshall Case and Warren F. Spencer, *The United States and France: Civil War Diplomacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 40-41.

¹⁰⁵ Leon to Benjamin, July 30, 1862, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. II, IV (Washington: G.P.O., 1900), 25.

¹⁰⁶ *Statesmen of the Lost Cause*, 283.

A prominent meeting between Slidell and the Emperor took place on October 28, 1862. Slidell met with Napoleon III to push France towards recognition yet again. The Emperor “had no scruples in declaring that his sympathies were entirely with the South,” but, the Emperor was worried that “if he acted alone, England, instead of following his example, would endeavor to embroil with the United States and that French commerce would be destroyed.”¹⁰⁷ This was an important meeting because it strongly showed the Emperor’s personal support for the Confederacy. Despite the support of the French Emperor, Slidell and the Confederacy had to either convince Napoleon III to act alone or James Mason and Slidell had to convince both England and France to work together. In an effort to further push the Emperor away from the English question, Slidell informed the Emperor that the recognition of the Confederacy would not mean war with the Union. Slidell and the Confederacy only “asked for recognition, satisfied that the moral effect of such a step... would exercise a controlling influence.”¹⁰⁸ Slidell pushed the idea that the North, after hearing of French, and possibly of English, recognition of the Confederacy would come to the table and negotiate an armistice and eventual peace agreement. However, in the event of war with the United States, Slidell attempted to put the Emperor at ease. The American navy “would be swept from the ocean and all their principle ports efficiently blockaded by a moiety of his [French] marine.”¹⁰⁹ Slidell played down the power of the Union industry and military. He was confident that the Union would exhaust itself by staying in the war. This was the most important item to make the Emperor aware of. The Union “energies and resources were already taxed to their utmost by the war...”

¹⁰⁷ Slidell to Benjamin, October 28, 1862, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 575.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 575.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 575.

and the Lincoln administration, “still had sense enough not to seek a quarrel with the first power in the world.”¹¹⁰ The Union, according to Slidell was hardly able to stay in the war against the Confederates, let alone fight a multifront war with European superpowers. The Emperor proposed a mediation of France, England, and Russia between the North and South. Napoleon III suggested the mediation could be urged “on the high grounds of humanity and the interests of the whole civilized world. If it be refused by the North, it will afford good reason for recognition and perhaps for more active intervention.”¹¹¹ This mediation never occurred. France, England, and Russia could not agree on the terms and the Union would have never accepted the meditation even if it had occurred.

Slidell and the Confederate diplomatic mission in France was quickly falling apart. By the end of 1862, the window for recognition was fading. The military campaigns in the West were dominated by Union armies, and in the eastern theater, the balance of power was starting to shift. Slidell and his team did their best. However, the military reality on the ground was not helping their case. Despite the setbacks, Slidell did manage to negotiate a loan with Messrs. Emile Erlanger & Co. They conducted business with the Confederacy in the form of cotton bonds and channeled French money into the Southern railroads. Slidell was approached by the company while in Paris and the agents representing Messrs. Emile Erlanger & Co. “presented themselves to me [Slidell] without any suggestions on my part of a desire to borrow money for the Confederate States.”¹¹² The business ties between the Confederate States and France were strong. The business sector realized the importance of southern cotton and the market they generated for

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 575.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 575.

¹¹² Slidell to Benjamin, October 28, 1862, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 568.

French businesses. The loan was \$15,000,000 repayable in gold or cotton bonds. This loan was one of the biggest accomplishments of Slidell in Paris. To Slidell, the loan represented “financial recognition of our [Confederate] independence, emanating from a class proverbially cautious and little given to be influenced by sentiment or sympathy.”¹¹³ This loan, given by a French banking firm, was proof to Slidell that France recognized the Confederate States of America as a sovereign, independent nation. The wealthy class of French society did not hand out loans on the good graces of their heart. They believed in who they loaned to and the Confederates, especially Slidell, saw that as proof of their legal existence in the world of nations. However, his translation of a large loan from a French firm to the global community recognizing the legitimacy of the Confederate States of America proved to be a false comparison.

The Confederate efforts in France were extensive and well calculated. Slidell knew his mission and the objectives he was supposed to accomplish during his trip. Slidell had numerous, although unofficial, meetings with Emperor Napoleon III that were friendly and cordial. The Emperor favored the Confederate States and the breakup of the Union. However, Slidell could not convince the French ruler to act on his personal convictions. It seemed as if the Confederates were in a position in France to best the Union and acquire a friend. But, the Emperor did not act without the English support. Slidell and his delegation could not manage to sway a friendly, sympathetic government to support their cause. Dayton and the Union managed to outmaneuver Slidell and the Confederate diplomatic operations in France.

¹¹³ Slidell to Benjamin, March 21, 1863, in in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 721.

Another important minor power in Europe was Russia. Under the rule of Czar Alexander II and on the fringes of Europe, Russia had just got out of the Crimean War in 1856. It lost to an alliance between France, England, and the Ottoman Empire. It was a humiliating defeat for Russia and the czar. France and England succeeded in propping up the Ottoman Empire, which was in decline. The West needed a counterweight to Russian expansion and the Ottomans were strategically located to provide that balance to the rising Russian power. After the war, Russia was diplomatically isolated from the rest of Europe. Its alliances with Austria and others were dismantled and Russia was left to fend for itself. Russia received little to no help in the years following the war. It was clear that France and England had other priorities. This diplomatic isolation and hatred towards England and France played a role in the foreign relations during the American Civil War. With England and France leaning towards the Confederacy initially, Russia went in the opposite direction.

In the family of nations, Russia sought support from the United States—her one potential ally. In the years leading up to the Civil War, Russian Minister Plenipotentiary to the United States, Eduard de Stoeckl did his best to charm Washington D.C. He first came to the United States in 1841 as an attaché from the Russian government. He was then promoted after the death of Alexander Bodisco in 1854.¹¹⁴ Stoeckl managed to keep warm, friendly relations with the United States during the Crimean War, and he hoped to achieve the same success during the American Civil War. Stoeckl enjoyed entertaining guests, and although very sociable, was very observant and tactical. Because he rubbed elbows with so many representatives in D.C., he was well aware of the sectional crisis

¹¹⁴ Albert Woldman, *Lincoln and the Russians* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1952), 15.

brewing in the United States; it deeply concerned Stoeckl. His knowledge of the crisis led him to keep the Russian government well informed as well. This vital information was crucial to the decision-making being made by top Russian officials in St. Petersburg. An intact Union provided a counterweight to England and France. The Russians needed a strong United States for their own diplomatic and economic advantage.¹¹⁵

The United States sent Cassius Clay, a Kentucky native with strong ambitions to end slavery, to Russia to fight for the Union cause. Clay was born on October 19, 1810 in Madison County, Kentucky.¹¹⁶ Clay was born into a family rich in history, lineage, and wealth. His father was one of the biggest slave owners in the state of Kentucky and Clay “began to study the system, or, rather, began to feel its wrongs.”¹¹⁷ Clay’s exposure to slavery and the brutality that accompanied the system never left him in adulthood. The images of plantations and the slaves who worked the fields and in homes helped Clay mold and shape his antislavery position later in life. However, early life for Clay revolved around his father, Green Clay. His wealth, power, and influence opened many doors for Cassius and his brothers. Clay’s father encouraged Cassius to acquire as much education as he could. So, in 1827, he enrolled in the Jesuit College of St. Joseph in Bardstown, Kentucky.¹¹⁸ Clay was a good student in college. He was smart, diligent, and persistent—all great qualities for a diplomat. In a twist of irony however, Clay struggled the most with his French studies, the diplomatic language used in Europe. In 1831, Clay departed Kentucky for Yale College in New Haven. While in New England, Clay’s perspective

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 54.

¹¹⁶ Cassius Clay, *The Life of Cassius Marcellus Clay: Memoirs, Writings, and Speeches*. (New York: J. Fletcher Brennan & Co. 1886), 17.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 25.

¹¹⁸ David, Smiley, *Lion of White Hall* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962), 11.

was drastically shifted. While in New England, Clay met with former President John Quincy Adams, Senator Daniel Webster, and sent letters to President Andrew Jackson.¹¹⁹ Clay wanted to expand his view of politics beyond the planter elite he grew up around in Kentucky. These influential political leaders, his studies at Yale College, and a chance meeting with William Lloyd Garrison, who had just begun publishing the *Liberator*, all made huge impressions on Clay, especially Garrison.¹²⁰ Garrison's fiery rhetoric about abolitionism and the immorality of slavery stuck with Clay. Along with the seeds of abolitionism, Clay also observed a free labor economy in New England. He witnessed people living in prosperity on soil that was of the poorest of quality. In the South, soil quality and wealth went hand-in-hand. The people of the South generated the vast majority of wealth from the ground. In New England, Clay observed mobility in the market and the mobility of wealth.

Clay returned to Kentucky a changed man. He saw the progress in New England and wanted the same for his home state of Kentucky. He saw potential for Kentucky to rise above the need for slavery and diversify and industrialize its economy. Clay foresaw himself as the lead politician for the rebirth of the Kentucky economy. He aligned himself with the non-slaveholders in Kentucky. Clay envisioned a robust and diversified economy much in the way Henry Clay had with his American System. In 1834, Clay was elected to the Kentucky House of Representatives. He served three terms and was voted out due to his growing calls for abolition in Kentucky.¹²¹ He survived an assassination attempt in 1843, during a political debate on slavery. Sam Brown, a hired gun, attempted

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 19-20.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 21.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 50.

to shoot Clay. However, Clay overpowered him and killed him with his Bowie knife.¹²² Clay fought for his cause and had nearly been killed because of it. This attempt on his life did not stop Clay from his antislavery grandiloquence. In 1845, Clay started his own antislavery newspaper in Kentucky, *The True American*. This is where the influence of Garrison shines for Clay. His antislavery message in Kentucky was not popular. Clay's press was run out of Kentucky after a mob came to burn it down only months after its first publication.¹²³ He moved the paper to Cincinnati, Ohio. At the time it was a leader in abolition and a safe space for Clay to print. He still resided in Kentucky after moving his paper, however. Clay continued to influence politics in Kentucky despite his paper being across the river in Ohio. When war broke out with Mexico in 1846, Clay joined the 1st Kentucky Calvary, or the "Old Infantry" company. Clay served as their captain after bribing the commanding officer Captain James Jackson to step down.¹²⁴ Clay went off to war in staunch opposition to it. An extreme Whig, Clay was in the minority who opposed President Polk's declaration of war from the very beginning. Like many Whigs, Clay believed President Polk used the Mexican American War as a means to expand slavery into the western territories.

Clay served one year as a volunteer during the war. He returned home in 1847 and saw the nation in conflict over the war. The Whig Party was starting to come apart over the issue of the war and how extreme its policy should be over slavery and its expansion. Clay was looking for a way out of the Whig Party before it totally collapsed. He wanted to save his political career. The Whigs were losing power in Kentucky and around the

¹²² Ibid, 57.

¹²³ Ibid, 90.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 116.

nation. The Free-Soil Party, founded in 1848, attracted Clay after the party split the vote and allowed Zachary Taylor to win the presidency. The potential of the party grew on Clay and he saw the power of antislavery sentiment on a national scale rather than on a state scale.¹²⁵ In 1854, a new political party entered the scene, the Republican Party. Clay joined immediately. The Free-Soil Party had paved the way for a party to oppose slavery. He fought for but did not secure the nomination in 1856 for president. That went to John C. Frémont. The Republican Party won in the 1860 election and Abraham Lincoln took notice of Clay's history of opposing slavery, his "conversion" from a slaveholder to a man screaming for abolition, and Clay's persistence. Despite those positive qualities, Lincoln found Clay too warlike for a prominent cabinet position. The Union was hanging in the balance and Lincoln feared Clay might push it over the edge.¹²⁶ William Seward, a friend of Clay, offered him a position in the State Department. Seward nominated Clay Minister to Russia. Clay was appointed on March 28, 1861 by Lincoln.

Clay's mission to Russia was simple and direct: maintain the current friendly relations with the Russian Emperor and prevent the Confederate States from swaying the Russian government towards recognition. As usual, Seward provided his diplomats with material and talking points to get the diplomacy off to a strong start. These points gave the Union diplomats an edge because they were well crafted and thought through in great detail. Clay's talking points were no exception. Seward reminded Clay, "Russia, like the United States, is an improving and expanding empire. Its track is eastward, while that of the United States is westward. The two nations, therefore, never come into rivalry or

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 149.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 169.

conflict.”¹²⁷ The United States had no reason to quarrel with Russia. The two nations stood on opposite ends of the globe and left one another to their own devices. The Russians were not players in the Atlantic trade like the English or the French. The United States did not need to worry about the Russians interfering. Seward wanted Clay to broach a wide range of topics while in Russia as well. The primary goal was dealing with the Confederacy. However, the Union still had other matters to attend to. Clay was instructed to “inquire whether the sluggish course of commerce between the two nations cannot be quickened, and its volume increased.”¹²⁸ Seward also thought ahead to the Union after the war. He was concerned over the issue of free travel between the two nations. The United States allowed Russians to “cross this western continent without once being required to exhibit a passport. Why will not Russia extend the same hospitality to us. . . .”¹²⁹ This freedom to travel was an extension of the equality of man principle that Seward, Clay, and other fervent abolitionists believed in. Seward and Clay warned the Russian czar that if the United States were to be broken into two republics, “the equilibrium of nations, maintained by this republic, on the one side, against the European system on the other continent, would be lost, and the struggles of nations in that system for dominion in this hemisphere and on the high seas. . . would be renewed. The progress of freedom. . . would be arrested, and the hopes of humanity. . . would be disappointed and indefinitely postponed.”¹³⁰ Seward obviously had an American bias and

¹²⁷ Seward to Clay, May 6, 1861, in United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: Russia*. Vol. I (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 293.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 293.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 293.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 296.

overstated the importance of the United States, at the time, in the global system. However, the point was to prove to the czar and the Russian government that they needed the United States as one united nation to stop the western Europeans from dominating the globe and starting further wars. At the end of the letter, in clear and direct language, Seward explained that the United States “refrains from all intervention whatever in their political affairs; and it expects the same just and generous forbearance in return.”¹³¹ The United States desired to conduct its affairs with Russia as if the Civil War was not raging on. The United States drafted the Monroe Doctrine to keep European powers out of the western hemisphere and followed a policy of non-interventionism. The fact the United States was engulfed in a civil war, according to Lincoln and Seward, did not change that fact. This demand was strategically placed at the end of the letter as a point of emphasis and to draw the attention of the reader.

On July 14, 1861, Clay met with the Russian Emperor, Alexander II. He was very receptive and friendly with the American delegation. Clay remarked ~~on~~ how the Emperor “had hopes of the perpetuity of the friendship between the two nations now, that in addition to all former ties we were bound together by a common sympathy in the common cause of emancipation.”¹³² Alexander II issued his own version of the Emancipation Proclamation in March 1861 that freed all the serfs in Russia. Alexander II viewed the Civil War in terms of slavery versus abolition. The Union’s goal of abolition came much later in the conflict. Nonetheless, the Emperor saw his interests and ideals

¹³¹ Ibid, 296-297.

¹³² Clay to Seward, June 21, 1861, in United States Department of State. *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: Russia*. Vol. I (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 305.

aligned with the Union rather than the Confederacy. Clay's mission in 1861 was a breeze compared to his counterparts in England or France. He worked with a very sympathetic government from the outset of the war. The Russians understood that the United States was a vital ally against the French and the British. Russia and the Emperor understood that a strong U.S. could stand up against the threat of western European aggression and economic dominance.

The Union diplomats in Russia had no Confederate diplomatic competition in 1861. Clay had the ear and full attention of the Russian government, and the Emperor was all ears. He was happy to hear the Union delegation speak. Soon, he and Clay developed a personal relationship alongside of their working relationship. Davis and Judah Benjamin had focused all of their attention on France and England for diplomatic support. Benjamin sent Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus Lamar II of Georgia and Mississippi to represent the Confederate interests in Russia. On November 19, 1862, Lamar was appointed Special Commissioner to Russia. Benjamin sent Lamar a letter detailing his nomination and mission in Russia. The Civil War raged for one year before any Confederate commissioner was nominated to head up relations with the Russian government. Benjamin warned Lamar that "our offers to enter into amicable relations with the great powers of Europe, whose proximity caused them to be first visited by our commissioners, naturally created some hesitation in approaching his Imperial Majesty Alexander II."¹³³ The Confederate government had sent their best diplomats to the French and English courts right after the war began. Russia was geographically and politically

¹³³ Benjamin to Lamar, November 19, 1861, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 606.

insignificant when compared with England or France, based on the Confederate diplomatic goals. Lamar left for Russia in 1863. He arrived in London a few weeks later and awaited further instructions from Benjamin. Those instructions never came from Richmond. What did come was a notice that “the Senate failed to ratify my [Lamar] nomination as commissioner to Russia.” Adding, “the President desires that I consider the official information of the fact as terminating my mission.”¹³⁴ The Confederate mission to Russia never made it to St. Petersburg or even to mainland Europe. Lamar met with Mason and Slidell while in London. He was briefed on the status of their missions. However, his own mission was not seen as important in 1863. The Russians were far away and in the pocket of Clay and the Union.

The Russians had a militarily centered goal in supporting the Union as well as a political one. Since the United States was so friendly with the government of Alexander II, the Emperor decided to send two fleets, one to San Francisco and one to New York in 1863. The Americans saw this as proof of the Russian support for the Union and a step towards intervention. However, the Russians needed somewhere remote to hide their navy in the event of a war with England or France over the issue of the Confederacy. In New York, the fleet arrived in September 1863. *The New York Times* noted the “Russian frigate *Osliba*, which has lain at anchor in our harbor for several days past, and has been an object of so much interest to our citizens, is about to be reinforced by a fleet of four or five vessels of the same nationality.”¹³⁵ The Russian fleet was the object of attention and

¹³⁴ Lamar to Benjamin, July 22, 1863, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 848.

¹³⁵ “A Russian Fleet Coming into our Harbor: Their Arrival,” *New York Times*, September 24, 1863.

admiration. It reassured Union leaders that they had outside support for the war, even if it was in Russia's strategic interest to dock their fleet in American ports.

The missions in France and Russia demonstrate the struggle of the Confederate diplomats. France used the Civil War as an opportunity to attempt to restore a European monarchy on the throne of a weak Mexico. The Confederates could not convince France to join the war because they were planning their own with Mexico. Although sympathetic to the Confederate cause, Napoleon III had his own ambitions and Slidell was not able to reign him in. This was a major diplomatic failure for the Confederacy. France had been an early supporter of the independence of the Confederacy, more so than England. The failure to obtain recognition from France only left England as an option. The Confederates shot themselves in the foot with their 'tunnel vision' diplomacy with England and France. The Confederate State Department and Davis were so concerned about the English and the French that they ignored many potential friends. Russia was in support of the Union from the outset. However, Davis and the Confederates failed to send an envoy to Alexander II. The Confederates needed support from wherever they could find it, and their inability to engage Russia shows how focused, too focused, they were on France and England. Now with the Russian and the French missions a failure, Mason and his associates in London were Davis' last hope at recognition.

Chapter Four: Essential England

For the Confederates, England was the ultimate prize. She ruled the seas and was the world's economic and military superpower. England carried an enormous amount of soft power as well. The Queen and her government influenced what other European nations did or did not do. This power was also a target of the Confederates. They needed the soft power of England to persuade other European governments to recognize the Confederacy. No nation wanted to stand alone or take the lead in recognizing the Confederate States of America. The soft power could be used, alongside hard power, to pressure the Union to the bargaining table. These lofty hopes could not be realized without first convincing the British the Confederacy was in fact a legitimate nation worthy of nationhood.

Davis first appointed William Yancey to England. Yancey, a native of Alabama, was a staunch defender of slavery and states' rights. He was cold, harsh, and arrogant. Yancey was passed over for the Confederate presidency and neither Davis nor Yancey forgot about that. Yancey had no diplomatic experience before his appointment to head the Confederate delegation to Europe. The political instability Yancey caused Davis and the Democratic Party in 1860 made Yancey a target of Davis. The new nation could not afford political enemies, and Davis "banished" Yancey to England. On March 16, 1861, Robert Toombs notified Yancey, Pierre Rost, and Dudley Mann of their appointment as special commissioners of the Confederate States to Europe.¹³⁶ While in England Yancey continued his habit of arrogance and brashness. British Foreign Secretary Lord John Russell refused to meet with Yancey in any formal capacity. Yancey, a strong supporter

¹³⁶ Toombs to Yancey, Rost, and Mann, March 16, 1861, in *The Messages and Papers of Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy 1861-1865* (New York: Chelsea House, 1966), 3.

of slavery, was in sharp contrast to Russell. The two men did not get along and their relationship represented the lack of success of Yancey as a diplomat.¹³⁷ The slow work of diplomacy and the inaction of the British government discouraged Yancey. He did not want a diplomatic post. He accepted the position from Davis after he failed to secure a position in the president's cabinet. The lack of progress paired with Yancey's harshness and lack of passion for the job culminated in his resignation in late August. It was received by the new Secretary of State Robert Hunter on September 23, 1861. In his reply to Yancey, Hunter "communicated the request to the President...and he accepts your resignation with regret."¹³⁸ Yancey did not leave Europe until his replacement, James Mason arrived. However, Mason and his counterpart John Slidell would not make it to Europe until 1862.

Mason was born November 3, 1798 on Analostan Island (present day Theodore Roosevelt Island) in the Potomac River.¹³⁹ Mason enjoyed a wealthy upbringing. His family was social, not only with themselves, but with the surrounding community. The proximity to the nation's capital also influenced Mason. His father exposed him to politics at an early age. He often brought Mason on trips to the Capitol. Mason was drawn to the debates in Congress.¹⁴⁰ Mason, having seen and been a part of the Congressional debates in and around the War of 1812, was mesmerized by the skill and tact of the congressmen. His love for politics and the law grew out of these experiences

¹³⁷ Charles Hubbard, *The Burden of Confederate Diplomacy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 31.

¹³⁸ Hunter to Yancey, September 23, 1861, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 273.

¹³⁹ Robert Young, *Senator James Murray Mason: Defender of the Old South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 3.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 3.

with his father. Mason graduated from University of Pennsylvania in 1818 after much protesting from his father. Mason went on to earn a law degree from the College of William and Mary in 1820.¹⁴¹ The law degree allowed Mason to venture out on his own, away from the shadow cast by his father. He set up his own law practice in Winchester, Virginia after graduating from William and Mary. This firm gave Mason the independence he craved, and the financial stability allowed Mason to look to the world of politics.

His entrance into politics was not glorious or impressive. Mason was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1826. He had a very strict interpretation of the Constitution.¹⁴² He viewed the states as the locus of power in the United States, not the federal government. However, in the following year, Mason lost his reelection bid because he voted against a resolution to build roads and canals and other internal improvements in Virginia, something his constituents obviously wanted. He left office and returned home to practice law full time and be with his family. Despite being voted out of office, Mason was persistent. In 1828, he was appointed to serve as a delegate to the state convention for Andrew Jackson. And in March 1828, Mason was nominated to the House of Delegates by the Jacksonians.¹⁴³ Mason finished second in the race but for the House of Delegates, the two nominees with the most votes are elected. Again, Mason did not win elections by landslides or blowouts. His strict reading of the Constitution was a turnoff to many voters in the late 1820s and early 1830s. He served in the House of Delegates until 1831. Mason once again lost his reelection bid and did not return to

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 5-6.

¹⁴² Ibid, 7.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 9.

politics until he was elected to the House of Representatives in 1837.¹⁴⁴ He was ousted from the House just two years later. Not by the voters but by the Democratic Party. Mason was too outspoken and was teetering on radical views.¹⁴⁵ Mason was again out of political office. His life out of the political arena was not much of a spectacle. He practiced law and provided for his family. Being a good father to his kids was a top priority for Mason when he was not serving the State of Virginia. However, during his time away, Mason was itching to return to politics.

In 1847, Mason received an opening in the Senate after the death of Isaac Pennybacker.¹⁴⁶ Mason was elected to fill the vacancy left by Pennybacker. Upon his arrival to the Senate, Mason opened with a defense of slavery. Although Mason argued for and was a defender of slavery, his reasoning was rooted in the defense of private property from federal interference. This belief sprang from his strict construction of the Constitution. Mason also argued the Founding Fathers intended the federal government to handle foreign affairs while domestic affairs were under the authority of the states.¹⁴⁷ Mason disliked any growth in federal power. He strongly opposed a bill to create the Department of the Interior. The increase in size of the central government was never a good idea. Mason made his mark in the Senate during the sectional crisis in the years following the Mexican American War. As with many of his Southern and Northern countrymen, the years following the Mexican American War molded the policy and mindset those men would hold during the secession winter of 1860 and throughout the

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 16-17.

¹⁴⁵ Virginia Mason, ed., *The Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason* (New York: Neale Publishing Company, 1906), 48.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 50.

¹⁴⁷ *Senator James Murray Mason*, 27.

American Civil War. Mason drafted the now infamous bill known as the Fugitive Slave Law as part of the compromise measures between the North and the South in 1850.¹⁴⁸ This bill became part of a larger set of bills known as the Compromise of 1850. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 made each and every citizen, North or South, responsible for the recapture of runaway slaves. The bill required that all escaped slaves must be returned to their masters upon capture with the help and cooperation of all citizens. Mason realized that the bill had to have Northern support and participation to succeed.¹⁴⁹ His time in the Senate was defensive, outspoken, and fervent. Mason defended his beliefs to the extreme while in the Senate. He often sparred with New England Senators over the issue of slavery and its legality. He was a passionate southerner, but Mason was loyal to Virginia and his interpretation of the Constitution.

Slavery was debated by Mason numerous times during his stay in the Senate. However, Mason discussed foreign relations more often than any other issue, including slavery.¹⁵⁰ In 1852, Mason became the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. It is here that Mason gained his knowledge and love for international relations. His work on the committee seldom made headlines. Mason focused on fostering friendly relations with other governments. This skill along with other diplomatic and negotiating skills served Mason extremely well when he served as the Confederate commissioner to England. Mason served in the chairman role with the utmost dignity and professionalism. His deep-rooted nationalism also shined through while chairman. Mason pushed for bills that sought to diffuse tensions between England and the United States to further settle the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 37.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 51.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 62.

Washington Territory, and he also wanted the boundary with both Mexico and Canada clearly defined and any conflicts resolved. And, despite his quarrels with New England representatives over slavery, Mason supported the New Englanders in their dispute with England and Canada regarding the fisheries off the Canadian coast.¹⁵¹ Mason's nationalism and strong will to accomplish what he set out to do fueled his successes on the Foreign Relations Committee. His work helped him when he served the Confederate State Department. Mason resigned from the Senate in 1861 after the secession of Virginia to the Confederate States of America.

On the same day Hunter penned his reply to Yancey accepting his resignation, Hunter informed Mason "the President desires you that you should proceed to London with as little delay as possible, and place yourself as soon as you may be able to do so in communication with the Government."¹⁵² Mason, once in England, had to mend the relations with Secretary Russell and correct the damage caused by Yancey. Hunter also gave Mason new instructions and directions after taking over after the resignation of Robert Toombs. Mason had to reconstruct the image of the Confederacy in the eyes of the British government. The Confederacy, according to Hunter, should "not be viewed as revolted provinces or rebellious subjects seeking to overthrow the lawful authority of a common sovereign. Neither are we warring for rights of a doubtful character or such as are to be ascertained only by implication."¹⁵³ Hunter made the case that the Confederacy was indeed a legitimate nation with rights and goals and aspirations. The Confederate States of America was not a rebellion, but a lawful assertion of rights given to each state

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 65.

¹⁵² Hunter to Mason, September 23, 1861, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 257.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 257.

in the Union. The North was the oppressor, and the South broke away to defend itself from that aggression. Hunter, after only five months of fighting, characterized the war as “the most sanguinary and barbarous war which has been known for centuries among civilized people.”¹⁵⁴ Hunter evoked the horrors of the war in an attempt to sway England to save the peace-loving people of the Confederacy from the warmongering Union. An independent Confederacy “would exercise not a disturbing but a harmonizing influence on human society, for it would not only desire peace itself but to some extent become a bond of peace amongst others.”¹⁵⁵ Mason was instructed to convey that message of peace and unity to the British government and “when you [Mason] are officially recognized by the British Government and diplomatic relations between the two countries are thus fully established, you will request an audience with her Majesty.”¹⁵⁶ Hunter was quite optimistic about Mason and his abilities to secure official diplomatic relations with England. His faith in Mason rejuvenated the Southern State Department. Mason’s success in England was Confederate success as well; the two were interlocked. Hunter and Davis wanted to get Mason to England as soon as possible to replace Yancey.

Mason’s trip to England was fraught with danger. He was not appointed until late September and by then, the Union had established their blockade of the Confederacy. Mason would have to sail through the blockade to a British controlled island in the Caribbean to safely navigate the blockade. Mason arranged transport via the steamer *Gordon* for the sum of \$5,000 which the government of the Confederacy would have to

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 257.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 262.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 264.

pay.¹⁵⁷ Slidell and Mason left the following night and ran the blockade to Cuba. Mason and Slidell arrived in Cuba on the 18th of October. Mason reported his safe arrival to Hunter and added that “a rain came on at the last moment of our departure, which increasing the darkness the better enabled us to elude the blockading squadron.”¹⁵⁸ Unfortunately for Mason and Slidell, their stay in Cuba was extended by three weeks due to “the steamer for Cadiz, once a month, departed on its voyage from Havana the day of our arrival.”¹⁵⁹ Mason and Slidell departed Havana on the 7th of November aboard a British mail steamer, the *Trent*.

The *Trent* sparked an international crisis of monumental proportions. Captain Charles Wilkes, commander of the U.S.S. *San Jacinto*, was the man who set off the crisis on November 8, 1861 off the coast of Spanish territorial waters in the Caribbean.¹⁶⁰ Wilkes’ original orders from the Navy Department were to patrol off the coast of Africa and capture Confederate privateer ships. He was only to come to the Caribbean to refuel when needed. Wilkes soon caught wind of rumors that important members of the Confederacy were awaiting transport in Cuba while he was in port. Captain Wilkes, while resupplying in port, received new orders from the navy to return to the Philadelphia Navy Yard, or he could pursue the possibility of these Confederates in Cuba headed for England. He selected the latter option.¹⁶¹ Wilkes wanted to humiliate the Confederacy and bring glory and honor to both himself and his crew by capturing high level Confederate officials.

¹⁵⁷ Mason to Hunter, October 11, 1861, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 281.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 282.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 283.

¹⁶⁰ Norman Ferris, *The Trent Affair: A Diplomatic Crisis* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 19.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 19.

On the 8th of November Wilkes spotted the *Trent* and ordered warning shots to be fired across the bow of the steamer.¹⁶² The *San Jacinto* seized the *Trent* in international waters without casualties, and the head Confederate diplomats John Slidell and James Mason were indeed onboard the English ship that was headed for London. Wilkes took the prisoners back to the United States where he was greeted with a hero's welcome. The Union public was ecstatic to hear some good news about the war for once, and "the greatest excitement manifested in this city [New York], as well as in Washington, yesterday, upon the receipt of the news of the arrest of the rebel commissioners."¹⁶³ They were tired of hearing about the Union losses on the battlefield.¹⁶⁴ Mason and Slidell were transported to Fort Warren in Boston. The *New York Times* predicted that "the English government will make no serious complaint of the seizure of Mason and Slidell. She may possibly fasten upon some of the incidents of that capture as having been irregular, but the leading principles of international law are too clearly in favor of the action of Capt. Wilkes to leave room for any serious question."¹⁶⁵ The *New York Times* prediction was seriously incorrect. The British government did not take kindly to one of their ships being stopped and searched by an American vessel in international waters.

The initial British response was outrage. The British public and government were furious that their neutrality had been broken by the search of the *Trent*. On November 30, 1861, the English government ordered the English fleet into readiness, gathered troops to send to Canada, and began stockpiling supplies and munitions.¹⁶⁶ The British navy was

¹⁶² Ibid, 20.

¹⁶³ "The Arrest of Messrs. Slidell and Mason." *New York Herald* November 17, 1861.

¹⁶⁴ Robert Ferrell, "Civil War," in *American Diplomacy*, Third ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 257.

¹⁶⁵ "What we may Expect from England." *New York Times* November 19, 1861.

¹⁶⁶ *American Diplomacy*, 257.

also being put on high alert. Foreign Secretary Russell warned the Board of the Admiralty that the growing hostilities between the United States and England “makes it not unlikely that other sudden acts of aggression may be attempted.”¹⁶⁷ Admiral Alexander Milne was the commander of the North America and West Indies Station. He commanded the English fleet between Canada and the Caribbean. He was the British admiral on the front lines during the American Civil War. He navigated the blockade and the question of what to do with Confederate shipping. He had close ties with the British ambassador to the Union, Lord Richard Lyons. Admiral Milne was ordered by the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty to send his ships to strategic defensive locations due to “the existing state of affairs and to the possibility that actual hostilities may be commenced against England by the U.S. Government or that a declaration of war with the Govt. may be made by Great Britain.”¹⁶⁸ War between England and the United States loomed just over the horizon. Secretary Hunter was confident England would “take the proper steps to avenge the insult thus audaciously offered to their country by the United States.”¹⁶⁹

As England geared up for war with the United States, Lincoln and William Seward had a hard time controlling the American public after the capture of these very prominent Confederate diplomats. It was hard for them to negotiate with the British with the cheers and rejoicing of the public always in the background. Nevertheless, despite its initial reaction of war, the British government decided war was not the proper course of

¹⁶⁷ Russell to the Board of the Admiralty, November 30, 1861, in *The Milne Papers 1860-1862* (Farnham, Surrey, 2015), 516.

¹⁶⁸ The Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty to Milne, December 6, 1861, in *The Milne Papers 1860-1862* (Farnham, Surrey, 2015), 521.

¹⁶⁹ Hunter to Yancey, Rost, and Mann, November 20, 1861, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 297.

action.¹⁷⁰ England was not ready to defend Canada from a massive U.S. invasion and the Royal government did not know how Washington was going to react to the crisis. The transatlantic telegraph cable was established in 1858. However, during the crisis, the wire was broken; this allowed both England and the United States to cool off before rash decisions were made.¹⁷¹ This pause in communications also allowed public anger to die down as excitement from the *Trent* Affair faded in time. Both nations wanted a peaceful resolution to this crisis. Seward received an ultimatum from the British government demanding an apology and the release of the diplomats. Seward responded with a note of his own detailing that Wilkes acted without orders and the capture of the commissioners was in international waters. The United States, in Seward's mind, had every right to stop that ship.¹⁷² Since both sides feared a war in 1861 and the public outcry over the *Trent* incident was waning, Lincoln, on December 26th, 1861, released Slidell and Mason from federal prison and allowed them to travel to Europe.¹⁷³ The release of the Confederate prisoners was welcomed by all in Europe. The *Trent* Affair did not lead to war between the U.K. and the U.S. However, it would put a strain on their relationship for quite some time during the Civil War. Both Union and Confederates had the cloud of the *Trent* Affair looming over their heads during negotiations.

During the *Trent* crisis and the entire American Civil War, William Seward led the State Department and headed up the diplomatic mission for the United States.

William Seward was born on May 16, 1801 in rural New York to Mary and Samuel

¹⁷⁰ *American Diplomacy*, 257.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 258.

¹⁷² *Trent Affair*, 186-187.

¹⁷³ *American Diplomacy*, 258.

Seward.¹⁷⁴ His family resided in a small village where the community was very close. Seward's father was an important member of the small community. Samuel Seward also served in the New York legislature for a few years, but his passion was in local politics. William saw and heard the debates at the table or out in the community. He grew up around it and that exposure shaped his future career path. His father also shaped his opinion on slavery at an early age. William became an outspoken critic of slavery later in life and was quick to join the newly formed Republican Party. His antislavery views began at home with his father. Seward's parents made sure that William and the other kids knew the equality of both the black and white races.¹⁷⁵ The Republican Party provided a political opportunity to express that belief.

Seward left his small hometown village in 1816 for Union College. He was the only member of his family that attended college.¹⁷⁶ In school, Seward was driven, focused, bright, but also like to have fun. His college years formed and honed his debate skills that he used to propel himself later in his political career. Seward was in college when the sectional crisis in the United States was in its infancy. The balance of free and slave states was stable and the tension over slavery was starting to come to the forefront of American politics. Seward graduated from college in 1819 and went on to work in small law offices around New York.¹⁷⁷ Law was only a stepping stone for Seward. He moved to Auburn, New York and threw himself into politics. In Auburn, Seward crafted his skills as a politician from getting involved, like his father, in local politics. He

¹⁷⁴ Walter Stahr, *Seward: Lincoln's Indispensable Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 7.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 8.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 13.

advocated for popular elections and a people's party.¹⁷⁸ His early days of politics reflected his love and admiration for democracy and the democratic process. His push for popular elections and an early form Jacksonian Democracy in a small-town setting prepared him for his next ambition, state politics.

Seward was elected to the New York legislature in 1830. He brought his youth, debate skills, and vigor with him to Albany. His first major speech in the legislature was on the Second Bank of the United States. In 1832, President Andrew Jackson famously vetoed a bill to extend the bank's charter. Seward came out in favor of the bank and attacked the Democrats for their blind loyalty to the president.¹⁷⁹ Seward made his voice heard in the legislature. This was a very contentious and divisive time in America. The bank veto and Jackson were central issues of the day and the newly elected Seward attacked them both head on almost as soon as he arrived in the legislature in Albany. While in the legislature, Seward was also a member of New York's highest court, the Court for the Trial of Impeachments and the Correction of Errors. New York, like most states at the time had two different legal tracks: one for actions at law and one for actions in equity.¹⁸⁰ While serving on this court as a check to the judges in the lower courts, Seward heard many cases on a wide array of topics, land disputes, contracts, and issues of racial equality. It exposed him to the wider selection of problems facing America at the time. It took Seward from a state politician to a national one. His experience in the New York legislature prepared him for a changing America. One that became ever more divisive and divided along sectional lines.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 22.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 29.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 35.

Over the next few years, Seward continued to bounce between politics and law. Notably, in 1839, Seward was elected governor of New York until 1842. He was elected as Whig and served his state well. However, after his term was up, Seward opted to leave politics to settle debts and be with his family in Auburn.¹⁸¹ However, Seward could not be pulled away from politics for that long because in 1849, he was elected to the U.S. Senate to represent New York. Seward was already a political legend in New York. Now he made his mark on Washington. During his time in the Senate, Seward was his bold and outspoken self. He protested the South's attempt to secure more power and disrupt the delicate balance of power in America between slave and free states. His stance on slavery was still rooted in his parent's teachings on equality. He had seen the inequality in America from his days as a lawyer and serving in New York. Once in Washington, Seward was presented with a nation on the brink of a disaster. When he entered the Senate, a major sectional crisis was underway. The Mexican American War had opened the West for America. The debate after the war regarded the newly acquired territory and slavery's expansion into that new territory. The compromise that would, for the next decade, quell the sectional issue was being introduced into Congress when Seward arrived, the Compromise of 1850. It was a set of bills that hoped to put an end to the sectional divide in America over the issue of slavery. Seward wholeheartedly argued against the expansion of slavery into the West. The Compromise of 1850 passed and was put into effect. However, Seward was an outspoken critic of the pro-slavery measures put into the compromise. He famously declared that there was a "higher power than the

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 86.

Constitution” to remove slavery from America.¹⁸² This speech put Seward in the spotlight during the antebellum years and at the forefront of the antislavery movement. The staunch antislavery rhetoric of Seward and the rise of a new political party, the Republican Party, showed how deeply the sectional divide had become in political life in America. The Republican Party was as close to an abolition party in the late 1850s as a party could get. Seward was drawn to the new party and joined in 1855.¹⁸³

Seward’s political career early in his life had prepared him for his work later in life. Seward was used to getting his way and fighting with his political opponents. The Republican Convention in 1860, held in Chicago, was Seward’s chance to attain the ultimate position of power, the presidency. Going into the convention, Seward was the popular favorite. He was well known in Washington and beloved by his constituents back in New York. However, an up-and-coming single term congressman from Illinois challenged Seward for the nomination; that man was Abraham Lincoln. Seward and his team failed to recognize the threat that Lincoln posed. For over thirty years, Seward drew lines in the sand, made political enemies, and made controversial political stances. Lincoln had only served one term in Congress during the Mexican American War and opposed President Polk’s war and the expansion of slavery. This was not a controversial move, and Lincoln was far from the only person who questioned the president. Lincoln came into the convention with Midwest and New England support. Seward was an advocate for immigrant rights and the nativists in Pennsylvania and New England

¹⁸² John Taylor, *William Henry Seward: Lincoln’s Right Hand* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 1991), 85.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*,98-99.

resented Seward for it.¹⁸⁴ Their votes went to Lincoln. It was a crushing defeat for Seward.

After the convention in Chicago, Seward thought his political career was over. He had faith that Lincoln would win the election. However, he expected to be the president in 1860, not Lincoln. Despite their differences, after Lincoln's win, Seward was asked to be the secretary of state in the Lincoln administration. Seward, fearing exile to small town Auburn, accepted Lincoln's offer on December 28, 1860.¹⁸⁵ After Lincoln's election many of the Southern states seceded from the Union, starting with South Carolina. Seward, being a staunch unionist, tried to save the Union before the nation devolved into a civil war. His efforts to persuade Lincoln to negotiate failed. The Lincoln administration took a policy of non-negotiation with the states in open rebellion with the government. Seward did not want bloodshed. However, as more states left the Union after Lincoln's call for troops to put down the rebellion, Seward gave up his peaceable position and turned into a hawk.

This aggressive posture carried over during his time as secretary of state. He was determined to prevent the European powers, especially England, from recognizing the Confederacy as an independent nation. His tactics were aggressive, brash, threatening, and a bit desperate at times. However, his diplomats on the ground were much more aware of the delicate situation the Union was in during the Civil War. The top diplomat for the Union during the Civil War was Charles Francis Adams. He was the son of President John Quincy Adams and the grandson of President John Adams. He was born

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 112.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 127.

on August 18, 1807 in Boston.¹⁸⁶ Charles Adams grew up in an ambassador family. Before becoming president, his father served as the United States Minister to Russia from 1809-1814 and England from 1815-1817 and his grandfather served as the Minister to England from 1785-1788.¹⁸⁷ The family had deep roots in both government and diplomacy. Charles Adams went to Harvard College where he finished his first term fifty-first in a class of fifty-nine.¹⁸⁸ His father pushed him hard and expected more from his son. John Quincy was worried about his son in school, but the family reputation and the public spotlight made John Quincy demand more from Charles. At Harvard, Charles Adams applied himself only to the classes he derived personal benefit from and as a result, Adams graduated Harvard in 1825 in the middle of his class.¹⁸⁹ After graduation, Adams practiced law in and around Boston. He stuck around his family until he was able to financially support himself after his marriage to Abigail Brooks. His father slowly pushed him into politics and away from practicing law. New England in the 1830s was transforming. The founding of the *Liberator* in 1831 and the murder of Elijah P. Lovejoy in 1837 had a profound impact on Adams.¹⁹⁰ He was by no means an abolitionist nor on the proslavery side. The slavery debate got Adams involved in politics and with the Whig Party.

In 1838, Adams was offered a Whig nomination for the state legislature. He refused because he felt he could best serve the community by remaining politically neutral and that allowed Adams to say what he wanted when we wanted to say it.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Martin Duberman, *Charles Francis Adams* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 1.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 8-9.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 20.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 21.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 62.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, 66.

However, the next few years saw the Whigs lose power to the Democrats and the New England fear of Southern power in government gripped Boston and Adams. In 1840, he was asked again to be a Whig candidate for the state House of Representatives.¹⁹² This time, Adams accepted and won easily. He went on to get reelected three times and serve in the Massachusetts Senate from 1843 to 1845. During his time in state politics, the influence of the antislavery and the early brewing of an abolition movement influenced Adams. He became more vocal on slavery and took a stand on the issue. Adams also spoke out against the admission of Texas into the Union and spoke out against the war with Mexico. Because Adams spoke out against the expansion of slavery and the Mexican-American War, he joined the Conscience Whigs. They were a branch of the Whig Party based in Massachusetts who opposed the annexation of Texas and feared the expansion of slavery to the West endangered the stability of the republic. During the convention to select candidates for the 1848 presidential election, Adams was elected as the vice-presidential candidate on the Free Soil Party ticket with former president Martin Van Buren.¹⁹³ Although not successful, Adams secured his position in antislavery politics. With the rise of the Republican Party in the 1850s, Adams supported Frémont for the Republican nomination. Frémont failed to win the presidency. However, Adams was inspired by his poll numbers and in 1858, Adams accepted a nomination to the U.S. House of Representatives where he served until the outbreak of the Civil War.¹⁹⁴

Charles Francis Adams was given his letter of instructions on April 10, 1861.

Seward told Adams to head to England where his task “involves the responsibility of

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 69.

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, 156.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 211.

preventing the commission of an act by the government of that country [Confederate States of America] which would be fraught with disaster, perhaps ruin, of our own.”¹⁹⁵ England was the main target of Confederate diplomacy. However, their goals and plans were not clear to Seward. Davis was quick to establish a government but was “slow in revealing its permanent character. Only outlines of a policy can be drawn.”¹⁹⁶ Adams headed to England almost blind on the Confederate diplomatic goals, aside from the obvious goal of recognition. Adams arrived in England on May 13, 1861. Once he arrived he went straight to work. The British government met with Adams in an official capacity, unlike with the Confederate delegation. Although Adams was met with cheers and joy after his arrival, he confided in a letter to Seward that he “cannot say that the public opinion is yet exactly what we would wish it. Much depends upon the course of things in the United States, and the firmness and energy made visible in the direction of affairs.”¹⁹⁷ The opening stages of the American Civil War were filled with uncertainty and tension, on both sides of the Atlantic. The British Parliament and British public had choices to make and opinions to form about the Confederate States of America. The chambers of Parliament and newspapers were filled with debates and arguments over the Confederate question. Both Adams and Mason, who arrived in England on January 29,

¹⁹⁵ Seward to Adams, April 10, 1865, in United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: Great Britain*. Vol. I. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 71.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 71.

¹⁹⁷ Adams to Seward, May 17, 1861, in United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: Great Britain*. Vol. I. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 87.

1862 after his release from Fort Warren, relied on these debates to relay possible diplomatic actions back to their respective governments.

The American Civil War was brought up in the House of Lords on April 29, 1861, shortly after the first shots of the war were fired at Fort Sumter. The question centered around Lord Lyons, British ambassador to the United States during the Civil War. Lord Wodehouse, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, told the members that the Government “came to the conclusion that it was not desirable that this country should intrude her officers or counsel on the Government of the United States. However great the interest which we may feel in the welfare of her people, and however anxious we might be to rescue them from the misfortune which appears to be impending over their heads, we yet thought that a great and independent nation might not welcome advice given with respect to her internal affairs, if that advice were proffered without being solicited.”¹⁹⁸ At the outbreak of the war, England did not want to interject her own opinion or mediation for fear of retaliation from the United States. England wished for a speedy resolution to the war, but the British government did not want to place itself in the United States’ domestic problems. The major diplomatic and legal dilemma during the opening stages of the war was the Union blockade of the Confederate ports.

When war erupted between the Union and the Confederacy the nations of the world had a choice to make regarding the Confederate States. Were they, as the Union characterized them, rebels who were in opposition to the federal government? Or, was the Confederate States of America an independent nation fighting for its right to exist in the world? Before the war, England and the United States were closely tied together by the

¹⁹⁸ Lord Wodehouse, House of Lords, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser. Vol. 162.

Atlantic trade. Relations had healed since the War of 1812 and the Napoleonic Wars. Trade was profitable for both nations. However, the war threatened that trade. The British government, fearful of their shipping rights to both nations, took the middle option at the outbreak of the conflict and, on May 6, 1861, “the Attorney and Solicitor General, and the Queen's Advocate and the Government have come to the opinion that the Southern Confederacy of America...must be treated as a belligerent.”¹⁹⁹ Giving the Confederacy belligerent status gave them some rights under international law and was a step from formal recognition. The proclamation of neutrality and belligerent status infuriated Seward. The proclamation left the United States “no alternative but to regard the government of Great Britain as questioning our free exercise of all the rights of self-defense guaranteed to us by our Constitution and the laws of nature and of nations to suppress the insurrection.”²⁰⁰ In the view of the Union, since the war was waged to put down a rebellion, England, and the larger European community of nations, had no right to interfere with the affairs happening within the boundaries of the United States. And since the Union fought an insurrection rather than a foreign nation, the government of the United States issued a blockade of the Southern ports to halt the import and export of goods and weapons that aided the Confederacy. This was part of a larger plan, the Anaconda Plan, to strangle and starve the Confederate States into submission. The blockade had a massive ripple effect across the Atlantic world.

¹⁹⁹ Lord Russell, House of Commons, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser. Vol. 162.

²⁰⁰ Seward to Adams, June 3, 1861, in United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: Great Britain*. Vol. I. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 97.

Seward and Adams knew the British government would not be happy about the blockade. The blockade was necessary for restoring order to the Union and the North had “a right to close the ports which have been seized by insurrectionists, for the purpose of suppressing the attempted revolution, and no one could justly complain if we had done so decisively and peremptorily.”²⁰¹ Seward also expressed the Union’s strong desire to “avoid imposing hardships unnecessarily onerous upon foreign as well as domestic commerce.”²⁰² The Union blockade, even though it eliminated the Southern ports from the global market, did not, according to Seward, have any intention of disturbing foreign trade. The British government, as well as any other foreign government, did not have any right to complain about the blockade because “the President’s proclamation was a notice of the intention to blockade, and it was provided that ample warning should be given to vessels approaching and vessels seeking to leave the blockaded ports before capture should be allowed.”²⁰³ Despite the ample warning, according to Seward, the British government was divided over the issue of the blockade. Admiral Milne summed up the concerns of the British government by raising questions that took the entire war to resolve in some cases in a letter to the Secretary of the Admiralty where he asked if the United States and the Confederates were

considered in a state of actual war? And if so, how far does the Paris Declaration of 1856, in respect to free Ships making free goods, if not contraband of war, and neutral goods, not contraband, not being seizable in Enemies’ Ships, to be considered applicable to British Ships conveying goods, the property of either Belligerent, or their Ships conveying British goods? Are the Belligerents to be allowed to visit and search our merchant Ships on the High Seas? Contraband of

²⁰¹ Seward to Adams, June 8, 1861, in United States Department of State, *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: Great Britain*. Vol. I. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 103.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 103.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 103.

War will probably be defined by each of the Belligerents? The validity of a Blockade held to be dependent on its efficiency?²⁰⁴
 The British government did recognize both sides as belligerent nations. However, exactly how far the rights entitled to belligerent nations extended was another question because the British government was forced to determine exactly how effective the Union blockade of the South was in order to figure out its legality.

The Declaration of Paris in 1856 was the leading international maritime law at the time. It was drafted after the Crimean War. This document was the document the Europeans, Northerners, and Southerners used to justify their naval actions during the American Civil War. The Civil War was the first major conflict where the Declaration of Paris came into play. The treaty “(1) abolished privateering, (2) the neutral flag covers enemy goods with the exception of contraband of war, (3) Neutral goods, with the exception of contraband of war, are not liable to capture under an enemy flag, and (4) Blockades, in order to be binding, must be effective, that is to say, maintained by a force sufficient to prevent access to the coasts of an enemy.”²⁰⁵ The treaty was revolutionary in naval combat because of the removal of privateering and the rules regarding a blockade. Those two issues were central to the debate in England and North America during the war. The United States did not sign on to the Declaration of Paris. They did not want to be involved with European law, and during warfare, the United States relied heavily on the use of privateers due to the small size of its navy. However, in an attempt to appease

²⁰⁴ Milne to the Secretary of the Admiralty, May 1, 1861, in John F. Beeler, ed., *The Milne Papers: The Papers of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Alexander Milne (1806-1896)*, vol. II (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate for the Navy Records Society, 2015), 270.

²⁰⁵ Charles Stockton, "The Declaration of Paris," *The American Journal of International Law* 14, no. 3 (July 1920): 356.

England, the U.S. declared that it would respect the articles of the declaration but did not sign the document.

Jefferson Davis and the Confederate government refused to sign on to the Declaration of Paris nor did they agree to respect the treaty. In fact, Davis went a step further and directly opposed the declaration by issuing a proclamation calling for privateers and issuing letters of marque on the 17th of April. President Davis invited “all those who may desire, by service in private armed vessels on the high seas, to aid this government in resisting so wanton and wicked an aggression, to make application for commissions or letters of marque and reprisal, to be issued under the seal of these Confederate States.”²⁰⁶ The Confederates had no navy to speak of at the opening of the war and needed privateering to break the blockade and attempt to secure its ports and shores. The Union stranglehold on Southern ports only grew with time. The vastly superior Union navy, although stretched thin, managed to put up a more or less effective blockade of the Confederate States by spring 1862. This was important because of article four of the Paris Declaration—blockades must be effective for them to be binding. Seward assured the British government that “the blockade from the time it takes effect is everywhere rendered actual and effective.”²⁰⁷ Lord Russell noticed the Union’s effort to maintain an effective blockade and mentioned before the House of Lords that the blockade was

a matter of the greatest importance to them—it was a vital point of their policy; therefore we cannot doubt that they used every means in their power. We find that

²⁰⁶ Jefferson Davis Proclamation, April 17, 1861, in *Messages and Papers of Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy Including Diplomatic Correspondence 1861-1865*, vol. I (New York: Chelsea House, 1966), 60.

²⁰⁷ Seward to Adams, June 8, 1861, in United States Department of State. *Message of the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the second session of the thirty-seventh congress: Instructions and Dispatches: Great Britain*. Vol. I. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1861), 103.

as early as the 15th of July, when complaints were made in some of the New York papers that the blockading squadron was not sufficient, that the Government had then sent on that service 34 men-of-war, of 56,000 tons, with 726 guns, and 10,113 men. This showed that the Federal Government made great efforts to render the blockade efficient.²⁰⁸

By early 1862, it was clear the English were not going to interfere with the Union blockade. This was made clear to Mason who sat in on the House of Lords to listen to the debate on the 10th of March 1862 and told the Confederate State Department that “on the question of the blockade... no step will be taken by this Government [England] to interfere with it.”²⁰⁹ The decreasing supply of cotton along with Mason’s inability to convince the British government of the ineffectiveness of the blockade sunk the Confederate hopes of English intervention to break up the blockade. A few weeks later, Slidell had equally bad news from Paris. Slidell regretfully told Secretary Hunter that France has “proclaimed the full adhesion of the Emperor to Earl Russell’s views of the efficiency of the Federal blockade of our coast.”²¹⁰ In a matter of weeks, the hopes of European intervention to break the blockade and save the strangled Confederacy were gone. The English and the French both declared, together, that the blockade was effective and the Declaration of Paris, which the United States agreed to adhere to but not sign, was not violated. The Southern commissioners were outplayed by their Union counterparts and were prevented from swaying the opinion of the European courts.

James Mason failed to secure any diplomatic assistance from England. The Confederacy needed the British navy to break the blockade and supply their armies with

²⁰⁸ Lord Russell, March 10, 1862, House of Lords, *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser. Vol. 165.

²⁰⁹ Mason to Confederate Secretary of State, March 11, 1862, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 358.

²¹⁰ Slidell to Hunter, March 26, 1862, in *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies*, vol. III, II (Washington: G.P.O., 1922), 372.

munitions and food. Mason never received an official meeting with Lord Russell, and the British government was hesitant to even meet with Mason unofficially in fear of creating tension with the United States. Charles Adams was a born diplomat. His family was full of diplomats and successful individuals. His government provided Adams with support and results, both diplomatically and militarily, that the Confederate government could not give to Mason. With England's support out of the picture, the Confederates were out of feasible options for foreign support. The most powerful nation in Europe and the globe refused to recognize the Confederate States of America. That sent a message to the other nations of Europe—follow in the footsteps of England.

Conclusion

By all accounts, the Confederate States of America was a failure. The radical experiment to break away from the Union and the assertion of states' rights over the power of the federal government designed by the planter elite and fought for by the poor whites of the South died on May 9, 1865 at Appomattox Courthouse after the Army of Northern Virginia surrendered. The four long, bloody years of turmoil was over. The Confederates not only failed in their attempt to break away, they also failed in their attempts to gain European support for their cause and their independence. By the summer of 1863, the Union held the military advantage on the battlefield. With their massive manpower advantage coupled with their manufacturing capacity, the Union armies saw success after success. The military successes were not an anomaly, nor were they independent of the diplomatic successes achieved by the Union State Department. The victories on the battlefields in America gave extra leverage at the diplomatic table for the Union. The adverse was true for the Confederate commissioners as well. Although the battlefield was a factor in the overall failure of the Confederacy, the real failure started and ended with the commissioners themselves.

Diplomacy is a very strategic dance played one-on-one in person, even in today's modern, digital world of social media and the internet. The importance of the interactions and the meetings with heads of state or foreign relations officials were vital to the diplomacy in the 19th century. Meetings face to face with a foreign minister allowed direct communication of ideas, demands, offers, or pleas. The Confederates failed to secure official meetings with European leaders or ministers during the war. The major

nations of England and France saw the Confederate diplomats right from the start in an unofficial capacity since they were not a recognized nation. These meetings proved an enormous opportunity to Davis and his government for securing future meetings or recognition and intervention. However, the Southern diplomatic commissioners failed to do their job effectively and thus they failed to secure future one-on-one meetings. Mason, who headed the most important delegation for the Confederate cause in all of Europe, in particular, failed to convince Lord Russell or Her Majesty's government to support the Confederate cause in their first meeting. Mason was not effective at selling the right for the Confederate States of America to exist among the family of nations. This initial failure, coupled with the resignation of Yancey shortly after his arrival to England, set the Confederacy up for failure in England.

The Confederate State Department provided little help to their commissioners who they sent abroad. The initial instructions for their diplomats from the secretaries of state were fairly clear, but the lofty moral and legal reasons the Confederates cited to justify their independence was not conveyed in any meaningful or convincing way. The diplomats relied on their own abilities without much follow up direction from a Confederate State Department in constant turnover. The revolving door at the secretary of state's office was a major problem for the Confederacy. There was no single leader who took the reins on foreign policy for the Confederate States of America. That proved to be one of the major setbacks faced by the Confederacy and not by the Union. The changing secretaries of state during the war also exemplified the lack of care coming from that office. Both Toombs and Hunter resigned the post because they found it to be boring and without glory. For the American Southerner, glory and honor was everything. War was

glorified, and a system of old European style honor and gentlemanliness existed. Sitting behind a desk writing letters did not fit in that model of war constructed by the Confederacy. The lack of care and the lack of desire to be in the State Department challenged the Confederate diplomats unnecessarily.

Although official Confederate government diplomatic efforts were utter failures, the agents who the government sent to negotiate weapons deals, loans, trade deals, or manufacturing contracts were far more successful. These efforts were not included in this thesis because they did not represent, nor were they part of, the official Confederate diplomatic agenda. These agents often conducted business with businesses or companies who worked behind the back of their government or against the laws of their country. Although these actions are not elaborated here in this thesis, they are worth noting since they did happen and suggest the Confederates did not fail every time in foreign negotiating. The most famous example of this success is the building of the *Alabama* by the British shipbuilding company John Laird Sons and Company in 1862. Since England declared neutrality in the American Civil War, they could not legally supply either side with arms or munitions. James Bulloch, who served in the United States navy before the war, was a secret agent assigned to England who oversaw Confederate naval operations and unofficial trade with England. He was very skilled at what he did, and his skills secured numerous trade deals. However, his biggest accomplishment was the commission of the CSS *Alabama*. Bulloch managed to establish enough support in Liverpool to arrange for John Laird Sons and Company to build and equip the ship for the Confederacy. The building of the ship broke both English and international law. Bulloch's success with the *Alabama* and financing the Confederacy with illegal cotton

shipments from the Confederacy to England illustrates the Confederate States of America had some limited success in Europe.

Despite the success of Bulloch and others, the main, official Southern diplomatic corps failed in Europe. The official treaties signed and ratified with the Native American tribes are just about the only formal success the Confederacy had in international relations. The story of the Civil War is not just an American one. The conflict spanned the Atlantic Ocean and was at the center of debate in European courts across the continent. It is important that these stories are told and are carried down. The success of either side of the conflict rested heavily on the shoulders of these diplomats in Europe. The future of a nation was partly in their hands. This mysterious and unknown side of the war needs to be brought into the light and out of the shadows. Diplomacy and international affairs are not limited to just the 20th and 21st centuries. For us as a nation, it is vital that our story, our entire story is told. Although not as exciting or glorious as military battles, the diplomatic struggle was just as important. In the case of the American Civil War, diplomacy changed the course of a nation and killed another. Diplomacy is a powerful weapon that can change the course of history, and in the 1860s, diplomacy did exactly that.

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